University of Alberta

Marina Warner: Feminist Mythographer

by

Jane Aikins Haslett ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Marina Warner: Feminist Mythographer," submitted by Jane Aikins Haslett in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Mythology is a word that brings to mind another world; it is the world of the supernatural, the fabulous, the unreal and half-imagined, almost a dream-world. In popular culture, a myth is a fictitious story, as opposed to "the truth" of a scientific fact, a newspaper report, or a policy statement. In this dissertation, I argue that the world of mythology is far more important in our daily lives than we imagine. I believe that we assimilate our own personal collections of myths from the time we are read to as children, and that this process continues for the rest of our lives. The myths that we collect range from ancient myths of other cultures to the cultural, political, familial and personal myths that circulate around us in the present day. Mythology, therefore, is a very important ingredient in our daily lives, even though its importance is often not recognised. My dissertation focuses on the work of mythographer Marina Warner, who researches and writes about mythology. Her work demonstrates that myths affect each one of us in subtle ways that may not be readily apparent, but are nevertheless intense. By tracing the connections between Warner's non-fiction and fiction, and focusing on her fictional characters in particular, I discuss the ways in which myths affect how we see the world, make sense of it to ourselves, and manage our daily existence. Finally, I believe that the significant role myth plays in our lives makes it imperative to pay more attention to the myths that we live by in practical ways. I advocate that they be discussed in our homes, our classrooms, our workplaces, and our community organisations, to promote understanding and better communication among us in a world which encourages people to become increasingly isolated and alienated from their own roots and from each other.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	For Now, Forever: Four Mythic Women	33
Chapter 3	Mapping the Exotic: The Far East and the South Seas	86
Chapter 4	Mapping Diaspora: America and the Caribbean	147
Chapter 5	Conclusion	212
	Works Cited	225

Introduction

Myth is the precedent behind every action, its invisible, ever-present lining.

Roberto Calasso

Myth is a word that acts to dislocate us from the round of daily life, invoking half-remembered ancient stories filled with exploits of gods and goddesses, ravished maidens birthing magical offspring, humans turned into animals, trees, or plants, legendary creatures like the unicorn, the misty, cloud-drenched forests of Arthurian Britain, unknown and unknowable landscapes. Even less understood by those of us immersed in Western European culture are the mythic realms found in stories from East and South Asia, and the stories of aboriginal peoples all over the world. A myth, according to the OED, is "a purely fictitious narrative, usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena." Fictitious is the key word here, and the definition as a whole tends toward superficiality; myths are stories from popular culture–not real, and not important. Researcher Marina Warner, however, has spent her prolific writing career demonstrating how myth affects people's daily lives in many significant ways. Researching myth and publishing her findings for almost three decades, she enters the landscapes of myth like a laser beam, searching, probing, uncovering, analysing, and above all illuminating. Warner's approach is scholarly, for she is a historical researcher of note, and political; she is committed to social progress, particularly around women's issues. The focus of her work has been on the symbolic meanings of the term woman, and how these meanings have influenced the realities of

women's lives. "That is probably my central interest," states Warner, "so within the myths there is a strong emphasis on what they mean for women as individuals" (Williams 260). In my dissertation, I will discuss in depth Warner's four earliest non-fiction texts and her first four novels, to discover what they reveal about how myths function in women's daily lives.

Warner is certainly not the first scholar to undertake a lifelong interest in myth. Mythologies, or the exposition of myths and groups of myths, have preoccupied scholars all over the world for many centuries; no one has yet succeeded in writing 'The Key to All Mythologies', though many have tried. Warner is clear about her own approach to myth, which is based on studies of Greek myth, as she explains in her foreword to a series of radio lectures[1]:

> my approach to myth is influenced by the French school of classicists, anthropologists and historians . . . who have analysed with exhilarating bravura certain stories and legends, cult practices and festivals, paying detailed attention to the way they are interwoven with social systems and how they both inform and reveal their workings. (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiii)

The ideas Warner sets here are applicable to all of her writing, and give an excellent background for her intellectual inquiries into myth. Warner cites as her guides French scholars Georges Dumézil, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Detienne

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[1] Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time: The 1994 Reith Lectures* (London, Vintage, 1994) previously broadcast by the BBC.

and Nicole Loraux, who all saw Greek myth from a sociological perspective. To situate their work and Warner's in a historical context of scholarship on myth, Jean-Pierre Vernant's study of myth in ancient Greece provides a useful and thorough outline.[2] In the last chapter of his text, he demonstrates how our Western European concept of myth, inherited from the Greeks, developed.

Vernant uses Marcel Detienne's previous research on the prehistory of the science of myth to outline "a tradition of thought peculiar to Western civilisation in which myth is defined in terms of what is not myth, being opposed first to reality (myth is fiction) and, secondly, to what is rational (myth is absurd)" (Vernant 186). At the outset, Vernant explains that there was not originally an opposition in Greek thought between *muthos*, or formulated speech, and *logos*, a term concerned with the forms of what is said. However, between the fourth and eighth centuries B. C., the concept of myth became defined through this opposition, and the two terms were viewed from then on as separate and contrasting. Vernant traces the influences in this process of the transitions from oral tradition to written literature, and from myth to history and philosophy, evident in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In sum, states Vernant, the image of myth passed on to us by the Greeks is paradoxical. Providing a frame of reference for Greek culture, at the same time it is defined negatively or explained away as something other than itself: myth is regarded as allegory:

> Myth appears as both the soil in which, in the course of centuries, a culture

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[2] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Janet Lloyd, translator, Sussex, Harvester Press, 1980).

> takes root and at the same time as a part of this culture whose authenticity the latter seems to fail to acknowledge. The reason for this is probably that the fundamental role, function, and meaning of myth are not immediately apparent to those who make use of it; these things do not, essentially, lie at the surface level of the stories. (Vernant 205)

Vernant points out that the study of Greek myths was hampered by their closeness to the mental universe of the West. It was not until the ancient data was viewed from a historical and cultural distance by anthropologists and ethnologists that significant progress was made in mythological research, which happened at the end of the eighteenth century. The problem to be solved was how to justify the existence of the irrational element of myth in ancient Greek civilisation alongside the very rarefied reason from which Western science and religion proceed.

Vernant uses the results of Detienne's studies of the school of comparative mythology, the English school of anthropology, and the German school of philology to demonstrate how scholarship on myth developed toward what he terms a science of mythology.

The work of Friedrich Max Müller, who saw myth as a perversion of language, laid the foundation for the school of comparative mythology, very influential in Germany and France. In his view, people responded with pathological language to natural phenomena such as sun cycles and storms; myth was a metaphorical perversion that occurred in the development of language. Here, mythologists undertook to explore language development to discover how human contact with nature was originally translated into language. A good mythologist of this school was said to have a feeling for

nature and naturalistic explanation was seen as more important than an analysis of the language of myth. An opposing view emerged in England with the English school of anthropology. Scholars including James George Frazer, Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford, and A. B. Cook considered myth to be a survival of primitive barbarity in civilised cultures which could be observed in peoples who were assumed to be living in a "savage" state of thought. Here, myth was affective, and the reverse of a civilised conceptual system, even said by Lévy-Bruhl to be a prelogical stage. Ritual was of primary importance from this anthropological perspective, and myth only a reflection of religious ritual in the language. The work of Jane Ellen Harrison, who felt that myth worked toward the promotion and conservation of human life, was considered groundbreaking in this group. However, her views were Eurocentric. According to Harrison, Greek myth was worthy of study, while the traces of other "heathen" mythologies and rituals should properly be consigned to oblivion!

A new German school of philology opposed both the linguistic and anthropological approaches. At this time (the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century), Otto Gruppe defined the purpose of the school as establishment of the origins and development of specific myths, using philology, chronography, and a historical and genetic method. Here, myth was assimilated to history, and the perspective sought to bring to light the historical reality that underlies legend. The specific character of myth was lost in this method, for versions of myths were studied as literature, with a focus on the genre of composition and the personalities of the writers. The most noble and authentic expressions of religion were said to be found in the works of great writers and

philosophers. Swedish scholar Martin P. Nilsson was very influential in this school, in which Greek religion was seen as a kind of gallery of portraits of individual gods, rather than a theological system, an organised whole. Vernant explains that all three of these approaches were directed toward discovering "origins" and lacked the framework for truly historical studies, recognising what distinguishes Greek thought from other forms of mythical expression and giving a sychronic account of the overall structure of such systems of thought. They were reductionist, according to Vernant, seeing myth in terms of an aberration, a ritual practice, or an historical event.

Between World Wars I and II, studies emerged that "all took myth seriously, accepting it as an undeniable dimension in human experience" (Vernant 216). Myth was, as Vernant puts it, rehabilitated by the three main theories of symbolism, functionalism, and structuralism, which still remain influential in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century studies of myth. Scholars who followed Friedrich Creuzer and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, particularly Ernst Cassirer, developed the notion that mythical symbolism was a mode of expression which differed from conceptual thought. This is the line of thinking that led to Freud's and Jung's psychology of the subconscious, the religious phenomenology of Van der Leuw and W. F. Otto, and the hermeneutics of historians of religion (notably Mircea Eliade) and philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur. In opposition to the linguistic sign, which refers to a referent outside itself and is determinate and circumscribed, the symbol belongs in part to what it expresses; it is somehow naturally linked to what it embodies. According to the symbolists, explains Vernant, the symbol does not refer to some object outside itself, but is tautegorical, standing on its own as a

declaration of itself. Symbols belong to the realm of affectivity and desire, where fundamental reactions and deep aspirations are lived within each person, and projected externally in forms created by the imagination. These mythical representations have basic structures (or archetypes, according to Jung) as consistent and universal as those of logical thought. Symbolism allows for two contrary interpretations of myth. If the symbol is seen as existing on a lower level than conceptual thought, it is connected with products of affective impulses such as appear in dream imagery and fantasies of neuroses. If existing on a higher level, it is connected with that in the psyche or collective unconscious which escapes the categories of understanding, which cannot be known, but which expresses aspirations to the infinite, or intimations of the sacred. Here, myth aims at something beyond what it actually says, which explains what Vernant calls

> the permanent vitality of myths, the way that they constantly become charged with new meanings and absorb commentaries, glosses and new interpretations that open them up to new dimensions of reality yet to be explored or rediscovered. (Vernant 219).

However, Vernant notes that neglecting the cultural, sociological, and historical context of myths, and putting aside the phonological, morphological and syntactical differences between groups of languages, is to open the door to incorrect or anachronistic conclusions.

Functionalists, notably anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, focused on the role myths play in the social and institutional context of the peoples among whom they circulate. Here, myth is one aspect of the complex system of social life, and is inextricably

linked with ritual, reinforcing the social cohesion of a group in a form easy to remember and transmit from generation to generation. Myth works to provide stability in society, and allows individuals to adjust their behaviour according to customary norms, procedures, and rules, and respect social hierarchies. Vernant regrets that these two perspectives do not take account of each other's ideas for the following reasons. Symbolists look at myth in its particular form as a story, but ignore the social context that might help illuminate it. Functionalists attempt to find the system behind myths, but instead of looking within the myths themselves, they look to the sociocultural context, where myths exist among other social institutions. Thus, for functionalists, myth says no more than social life does, and they ignore the specific nature of myth and its particular significance.

To remedy these problems, a group of French scholars including anthropologist Marcel Mauss, sinologist Marcel Granet, and Greek scholar Louis Gernet used the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim to bring the contributions of history, linguistics, and psychology to the study of myth. Mauss compared myth with language, a system of symbols allowing the possibility of communication within a group of people. Here, myth is an institutionalised system of symbols which effectively provide a way of organising experience: "Thought takes shape by expressing itself symbolically in and through myth as it does in and through a language: it comes into being even as it communicates" (Vernant 222). Granet found legend to be almost truer than history in his studies of China, for in it reside the same fundamental features of thought that language carries and expresses. Gernet also found mythical symbols, institutional practices, linguistic data and mental

frameworks to have an interdependent nature in his studies of Greece: there is no gap between the linguistic, institutional, and conceptual domains. Myth, to Gernet, expresses the total social situation; it is a kind of language, and it draws upon concrete images rather than abstract ideas. Georges Dumézil combined comparative philology and historical sociology to examine the history of religions and found structural analogies in various Indo-European pantheons and mythologies. Comparative mythology does not try to recreate history or reconstruct primitive societies, but to reveal mental structures. Here, analysis of myth respects myth's own specific features and approaches it from within, seeing the body of texts as an object of study as and for itself.

Dumézil's work opened the way for the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, after the Second World War, undertook a study of American-Indian mythology in the oral tradition. He saw myth as a system of communication, but used a model from structural linguistics to decipher myth to discover the underlying, non-narrative meaning of a story, the elements forming a synchronic system or permanent order constituting the semantic space from which the story emerged. A myth can be read on the manifest narrative level, but also on the deeper level that can only be reached by analysing the short phrases or "mythemes" that make up the story. The phrases expressing the mythemes are arranged along two axes, a horizontal one following the story's narrative, and the vertical one, in which mythemes are arranged in columns under an overrating of blood relations, an underrating or devaluation of the same blood relations, the denial of human autochthony (genealogical relationship to the earth), and the notion that humans are rooted like plants in the maternal soil of earth. These columns present a

dialectic that looks for balance between oppositions rather than answers, and oscillations rather than fixed positions. Lévi-Strauss used the Oedipus myth as the prime example of his theories, and saw mythmakers, whom he termed "bricoleurs" making patchwork quilts, "bricolages," from the mythemes. Vernant notes that Lévi-Strauss's use of the Oedipus myth was gratuitous and his method arbitrary, and sees his theories positioning myths as universals operating across time, taking no account of specific historical contexts in which they function. Anthropologist Mary Douglas agreed with Vernant's views of Lévi-Strauss, and felt that studies of myth should include ethnographic data.

Vernant ends his 1974 inquiry into the reason of myth calling for an exhaustive analysis of a myth which includes all details of its textual form, the semantic content and levels of meaning within the text, and, finally, consideration of a wider body of material to which the myth is related: its cultural context. Thus, a myth can be fully interpreted, and carefully placed in a context of a mental and social history. He goes on to pose several questions about the link between the semantic space revealed by the structural analysis as the myth's intellectual framework and the socio-historical context in which the myth was produced, and the relationship between a historical enquiry and a synchronic analysis. Vernant also considers the form of logic that myth brings into operation: the logic of the ambiguous, the equivocal, a logic of polarity, as opposed to the logic of non-contradiction of philosophy. In the end, he calls for a tool that the mythologist so far lacked: the structural model of a logic which is not the binary logic of yes or no, but a logic different from that of the *logos*.

History has always been as important to Marina Warner in her studies of myth as it

was to Vernant. She describes the influence of her father, who sold books for WH Smith after the war. He had an English bookshop in Cairo, which was burned because of anti-imperialist sentiments, and another, combined with a tea-room, in Brussels, before he finally settled in England. He had "a historical turn of mind" and while walking with Marina and her sister through various European and English cities and towns, he would tell countless stories about the streets and buildings they passed, and the people who made, unmade, and remade them (Warner, "Seeking" 63). He pointed out signs on stones and bricks, related military exploits, and told them about heroes and villains of the past in a way that made history a matter of extreme urgency. Following in his bent, though not necessarily sharing his views, Warner situates herself as an historical researcher first, and then a mythographer: "Historical research has always led me to myth; the attempt to see and hear people in the past carries investigations into areas far beyond the legal, economic and personal circumstances in which they lived, or the sequence of events in their experience" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xii). Warner explains that a culture's belief system is often revealed by the artefacts from a vanished civilisation, such as coins with figures stamped on them, and jewellery with charms for fertility or images to protect the wearer from the evil eye. Unlike many of the previous scholars studying myth, Warner does not seek to develop a theory explaining origins or categorisations of myth. She is far more interested in its effects on an individual's (especially a woman's) life. According to Warner: "Even the most immediate and intense emotional upheavals pass through a mesh of common images and utterance which are grounded in ideas about nature and the supernatural, about destiny and origin. These are rarely empirical, more usually imaginary"

(Warner, *Managing Monsters* xii). She notes that people use rituals to deal with personal upheavals, even in cultures which may be rationalist and secular, and feels that these rituals have deep connections to myth. It is this aspect of myth that interests Warner, and this aspect of her work that interests me.

Warner acknowledges the influence of the methodological approaches of Vernant and his colleagues, who, she notes, extend the Freudian and Jungian approaches to myth through their insistence that "the meanings of rituals and images change in relation to the social structure with which they interact" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiii). She also sees herself indebted to essays on mythology by Roland Barthes.[3] Warner appreciates Barthes's brilliance in contributing to the study of myth the notion that myths are not eternal truths, but historical compounds concealing their own fluidity, so that the stories they tell appear to be immutable, showing how things were, and are, and evermore shall be. However, Warner sees herself as less pessimistic than Barthes. He reveals how myth works to hide political motives and disseminate ideologies, and cynically states that myth is merely depoliticised speech which functions to empty reality (Barthes 142-3). Warner, on the contrary, seeks to use the understanding and clarification that Barthes provides to tell the old stories anew, in ways that "can sew and weave and knit different patterns into the social fabric," and urges that this ongoing enterprise is one in which everyone can participate (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiv). To Warner, myths are not written in stone, but often change significantly in content and meaning, and if examined with a view to their

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[3] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (translated by Annette Lavers, London, Jonathan Cape, 1972, originally published Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1957).

current relevance, can lead to newly told stories: "Pleas for a return to reason, for simply stripping away illusion, ignore the necessity and the vitality of mythic material in consciousness as well as unconsciousness" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* 14). Here, Warner demonstrates her political agenda, one which carries through all her writing. If she belonged to any school of mythological interpretation, states Warner, it would have as a motto a final notion from Plato's *Republic* where, despite his banishment of poets as liars from his ideal state, he offers the hope that stories might offer a path to salvation (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiv).

The perspectives of Warner, Barthes, and Plato, make it apparent that the boundaries between myth and politics are artificial and permeable. Where Barthes says that myth is depoliticised speech, I would argue that politics are mythologised speech. When one considers contemporary politics from this point of view, the intense upheavals over "political" phenomena such as First Nation land claims and Trudeaumania in Canada, the Kennedy clan and Elian Gonzalez in the United States, and Princess Diana in England all begin to make sense. From this perspective, there is no separation between church and state in people's psyches. Public support and admiration for a "hero" like President Clinton, with his "tragic flaws," and unshakeable public apathy around figures like Prime Minister Joe Clark attest to the fact that people want mythic heroes for politicians. The notion of politics as mythology also explains why actors do well as political leaders, and why opera, which connects myth and politics in a dramatic context, continues to be so

popular in our very pragmatic world (Warner herself has written two opera librettos[4]). Warner sheds light on this notion with her comments in an interview with David Dabydeen where she says that the English are not a spiritual people, and thus can accept a Queen as head of the church in the way that Italians would not: "We have a low appreciation of the sacred, little thirst for the transcendental" (Dabydeen 117). Warner comments that British worldliness and pragmatism have promoted a cult of reason that has continued to legitimise the idea of progress in terms of British education, power, and societal institutions and deny any connection between politics and the sacred. However, Warner also believes that whether symbols become hollow depends on the shifting of power in society, and, rather than being constructed of archetypes that are constants in people's psyches, "[m]yth almost always has a very deep hinterland of quite practical, legal and economic circumstances" (Dabydeen 119). In succeeding chapters I will argue that Warner's texts demonstrate how myth operates from this perspective. Moreover, they show how connections between Warner's political activism and her writing reveal the impossibility of establishing firm boundaries between politics and mythology.

Warner explains that although in common usage the word myth implies delusion and falsehood, myths actually function to make sense of ideas commonly considered universal, such as sexual identity and family relations. She is convinced that myths are

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[4] *The Queen of Shea's Legs*, (an unpublished libretto by Marina Warner, music by Julian Grant) was part of the National Opera Baalist Programme, 1992. *In the House of Crossed Desires* (libretto by Marina Warner, music by John Woolwich, London, Faber Music, 1996) toured England July-December 1996. Warner based the latter opera on the classical novel *The Golden Ass*, by Aculeus. She attempted to use traditionally effective old spells and figures: "the star-crossed lovers, the cross-dressed heroine, the very cross patriarch, and the crossings of destinies in any life"(Warner, *Donkey Business* 13).

more powerful, and exert more influence, than we imagine, and she uses her vast knowledge of myth in such a way that it will have a political influence. For example, Warner uses Dumézil's anthropology, which brings a tripartite structure of society to bear on the study of myth, to find evidence for the political claims she makes in her Reith lectures. Dumézil believed that myths address three main issues: fertility (the control of the continuation of the species), physical power (the authority of the warrior or the ruler), and sovereignty (including the authority of priests, magic, and art). Warner uses Dumézil's structure to investigate several of her own interests in contemporary society: struggles for control of women and children; the workings of masculine power; and the ways histories and national identities are developed and disseminated. In these lectures, the political aims that drive all Warner's writing are evident as she discusses notions of motherhood, male violence, the problems of raising children, the uses of wild animal symbolism, colonial conquest, and national identity formation. She states that "the hope for change is one of the dynamics of my writing, present in both the history and the fiction" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 31-2). Warner strives for political change in her writing around the same issues that she works with in the community at large. She has worked with groups such as Charter 88 (an organisation that seeks constitutional reform), the National Council for One-Parent Families, the Commission for a Multiethnic Britain, and Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture. Warner has also given a presentation at a symposium on obscenity in the arts, and a paper about democratic culture (in the sense of literature, art, and music), as well as producing innumerable articles, essays, and reviews discussing books, art exhibitions, and films. The underpinning feature of all Warner's work is that it

moves toward making hitherto overlooked or unrecognised connections between myth, cultural symbols, and social reality, particularly in regard to women's issues.

To make these connections, Warner uses a mixture of psychoanalysis of the Jungian variety, along with historical investigation, which she acknowledges is a somewhat difficult method of treating myth, although it accomplishes what she is aiming at:

> The Jungian analysis is a much easier thing to do really, to trace the sequence of images or stories unanchored to context or social realities, but I have tried to relate them to function, which of course is relating them to some kind of experience of reality. (Williams 262)

Thus, rather than relying solely on Jungian archetypes, Warner introduces a cultural and historical perspective while at the same time she affirms that mythic symbols do influence people. Philosophically, she sees herself as "an old-fashioned liberal humanist", turning away from the carnivalism, relativism, and cynicism of postmodernism, which she characterises as a kind of escapism from an ethical duty towards society (Williams 262). In a glowing memorial tribute to fellow-writer Angela Carter, Warner notes the "heroic optimism" of Carter's perspective.[5] Warner's own outlook might be described the same way when she says: "I just don't want yet to give up on the possibility that things can improve" (Williams 262). A feminist like Carter, Warner displays an uneasiness with some aspects of feminism. She is one of the women featured in the book *Beyond the Glass*

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[5] Angela Carter, editor of *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, died before the book's publication, and Warner wrote an introduction as a tribute to her friend (London, Virago 1992).

Ceiling, profiles of forty women who have made outstanding contributions to intellectual life in the modern world even though they themselves have not been touted as intellectuals or particularly honoured by academic institutions.[6] Here, Warner explains that she wonders whether her humanist position and wish for connection will prevent other feminists from seeing her as one of them. For example, she does not take the position that women are intrinsically virtuous, but believes "that if their interests were served that might be better for men and children and for everyone" (Williams 263). Warner says in a 1994 interview with Chantal Zabus: "I am seen as a feminist by the enemies of feminism, seen in that light by journalists or spectators who like to sneer at feminism of any kind. But feminists don't see me as a feminist. I am sort of caught in between" (Zabus, "Spinning" 526). She explains that her comment does not apply to all feminists, and that perhaps she does not participate enough in feminist activism, being involved more in the literary and cultural sphere. Warner considers that British feminism has two poles, the psychoanalytical, connected with the theories of Jacques Lacan,[7] and practical historical feminism, connected to the experiences and economic circumstances of working women. Warner considers "I'm rather a hybrid," not fitting into either group, but she wishes to be identified with the feminist movement nonetheless: "Sometimes I feel rejected" (Zabus, "Spinning" 526). To me, Warner's balanced view is persuasive because it allows a feminist

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[6] *Beyond the Glass Ceiling*, edited by Sian Griffiths with an introduction by Helena Kennedy, was published in association with *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1996).

[7] In this group, Warner identifies with the literary and cultural work of Jacqueline Rose, who has written texts such as *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, Verso, 1986).

perspective that attempts to take account of the men in women's lives in realistic ways, and in ways that do not attempt to put women on some kind of pedestal and/or demonise men.

Warner's writings reflect the feminist views of the eras in which she writes, and her politics have changed over the years as feminist issues of enormous importance in one decade might fade or disappear, to be replaced by others. In the early 1980s, Warner discusses the paradoxical power that women have, and the fear of this power that results in a backlash at any time when women band together in a group effort and their loyalties are to one another rather than to their menfolk.[8] Her article focuses on lesbianism as "the new bogeyman" of the right, used in connection with peace camps and other feminist demonstrations, and Warner characterises lesbianism as a political stand rather than a form of erotic contact (Warner, "Paradoxical Power" 74). Political lesbianism was certainly a strong feature of the early stages of second-wave feminism, and Warner makes an important point here. Warner goes on to argue that the growing separatism of the women's movement, particularly in the United States, signifies a movement toward a new symbolic order originating from the memories and imaginations of women without the involvement of men. She explains that women face a severe predicament, for it is impossible to remove oneself to a pure space outside the cultural frame in which one has been born and raised, for there is no "outside" to one's cultural milieu. This particular notion is a strong theme in all of Warner's writing, for she never allows of a utopia that

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[8] Marina Warner, "Paradoxical Power: Women's History", published in *Encounter* 61: 3, November 1983, pages 73-9.

can exist apart from the messy, ambivalent, and "patriarchally contaminated" world in which almost all women live. In her article, Warner notes that some historical phenomena and figures, such as lesbians and Amazons, give the illusion of independence and prefigure the female autonomy sought after by second-wave feminists, and thus they are role models for women seeking what Warner terms "an ancestry of foremothers" (Warner, "Paradoxical Power" 74-5). Warner goes on to outline the responses of women writers to the problem of achieving a new symbolic order that will also command academic respect, for she does not in any way advocate questionable or polemic scholarship. In fact she notes that some feminists who have unearthed historical material on early women are not careful enough listeners and fail to pay sufficient attention to the issues of race, class, and money in their accounts. Here, she echoes the views of feminist historiographer Barbara Newman, who notes that the hermeneutics of empathy and the hermeneutics of suspicion must go hand-in-hand in feminist research.[9] Even more importantly, argues Newman, the hermeneutics of suspicion must be applied to feminist constructs as well as the constructs that oppress women, in order to avoid self-righteous didacticism and bland uniformity. Newman urges that the three besetting sins of feminist researchers are the temptation to idealise, the temptation to pity, and the temptation to blame. Newman calls for a consciousness of responses to history *as* ethical judgements, and current concerns motivating those judgements. She advocates a New Historicist approach which crosses disciplinary boundaries between history and literature, and concerns itself with function,

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[9] Barbara Newman's views are expressed in her article "On the Ethics of Feminist Historiography" (*Exemplaria*, 1990).

and the consideration of social practices and audiences, all of which Warner also advocates.

History, for Warner, is natural feminist territory, which various feminists have entered by several routes in order to make previously silenced voices heard, for example publishing diaries, letters, speeches, pamphlets and visions of women from across the centuries, researching available information on women's lives from the past, and vindicating women historically considered villains. Although Warner takes to heart people's queries about why she does not write about men for a change, she agrees when interviewer Zabus inquires if she believes that traditional history must be supplemented: "Yes. More has to be uncovered. . . . That's the enriching part of feminism" (Zabus, "Spinning" 528). Warner considers that the telling of women's stories upsets the value system of traditional historical records:

> [H]istory metamorphoses into a mythology by which we can govern our lives, and contributes to peaceful change. Widening the categories, extending the available symbols, expanding the repertoire so that we will not use the past to lay atavistic traps for ourselves and repeat the domestic and sexual servitude that has made equality so difficult to achieve, without plunging down the cul-de-sac of separatism–these are the story-teller's, the woman historian's tasks. (Warner, "Paradoxical Power" 79)

Warner's feminist political aims, then, do not lead in the direction of separatism, but seek to redress a silence, to speak women's truths in a way that reflects their realities. In another article, Warner seeks to find a language for female pleasure that does not contain

violent images, and does not make the Freudian connection between pleasure and annihilation.[10] Here, she writes of a women's language discovered in the Chinese province of Hunan and reported in the Chinese press in 1986. The language was very old, and kept absolutely secret among the women who knew it. Nothing has been heard of it since, but its very existence, according to Warner, forces one to consider what a woman's language could possibly reflect. It leads her to consider how a focus on women's oppression diminishes women's place in history and culture, and call for a language expressing women's pleasure in images that do not mirror violence and pain. Warner sees women's language denigrated as prattle, chit-chat, tittle-tattle, gossip, and women themselves as scolds, nags, tongue-lashers, wheedlers, complainers, screechers, and railers. She aligns herself with French feminists Héléne Cixous and Cathérine Clément, who spoke out so strongly in the 1970s about the forcible silencing of women's voices,[11] and recognises her own difficulties in expressing herself in language that reflects her own experience in appropriate ways despite her educational and professional privilege.

Later, Warner's historical research developed a focus on nationhood, democracy, and culture. Her paper given at the Charter 88 / Independent 1991 Constitutional Convention reflects a concern with the fact that culture has to some extent taken over the previous function of religion, in the sense that culture is the voice and the face of the

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[10] Marina Warner, "Fighting Talk", in *The State of the Language*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, University of California Press, 1990).

[11] Their book *The Newly Born Woman*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986) was first published in 1975 as *La Jeune Née*.

people. For this reason, Warner advocates that culture needs to be cared for, upheld, and available in practice to everyone. There must be democratic access to it and representation within it, so that it reflects the diversity of those who partake of it and those who create it. Warner strongly advises that the free market place is not to be the forum for creating the possibility of a democratic culture, for it would impose a majority taste, monolithic and ultimately unworkable in a diverse society like that of Britain (a comment that is certainly applicable anywhere in the world in the twenty-first century). Warner calls for a multi-vocal, democratic culture that allows people to focus on living plurality organically, rather than seeking to bolster a spurious national identity. Her approach reflects a concern with the colonialist and post colonialist issues which were a major focus of feminist work in the 1990s. Warner is convinced that diaspora is the modern condition, and she sees men and women all over the world as having arrived from somewhere else, either in the distant or very recent past. She appreciates the ideas of Elizabeth Bishop, whose poetry speaks of dwellings without roots, and features transience, fragility, and impermanence while acknowledging those who have disappeared from history and culture in the past. Warner also notes George Lamming's work on abolished pasts, the loss of roots, exile, deracinating, and the building of new "homes" with bases in imagination rather than in fact, to become foundations for the future. She believes that "[we need a new myth to live by, and live with, and only by examining the old ones can we start its creation" (Warner "Imagining a Democratic Culture"). Thus, she agrees with the views of James Baldwin, who urged that acceptance of history means learning how to use it rather than drowning in it. Warner's Reith lectures include a piece in which she argues against ethnic nationalism.

She praises Derek Walcott, poet, dramatist, and winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize for literature, for his "exemplary openness to making a new model of the homeland, which doesn't exclude, but rather includes, which doesn't justify but seeks to understand" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* 94).

Warner's intense focus on history has precluded her from an approach to myth that has been adopted by many women scholars researching myth since the advent of second-wave feminism in the 1970s. A large body of feminist work on religion and myth follows an early (1936) book by Esther Mary Harding titled *Women's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*. Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman* (1978) , Mary Daly's ground-breaking *Beyond God the Father* (1973), her later *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) and anthropologist Marja Gimbutas's numerous investigations into ancient goddess worship are a very few of the innumerable texts to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Although Warner's publications began to appear at this time as well, her focus has been a different one than unearthing origins or constructing overarching theories. She has chosen to analyse myths with a view to their function in the cultures in which they emerged and the effects of their historical and geographical transmission, and ultimately to trace their effects on individual women's lives in the present. It is a cultural studies approach, and one which has moved with the times. In a recent article (1998), Warner advocates covert enlightenment rather than confrontation, and reiterates her intense belief in the power of stories.[12] She quotes from a poem by Emily Dickinson: "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant - / Success in circuit lies," giving examples of passing on proscribed

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[12] Marina Warner, "Seeking the Slant", in *History Today*, 48:11 (November 1998: 62-3).

information by subversive means, and Vladimir Nabokov's conviction that curiosity is the purest form of insubordination (Warner, "Seeking" 62). Dickinson's poem ends with a comment that could apply to Warner's methods: "the Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind" (*Complete Poems* 507).[13] Warner does "dazzle gradually" as she follows her stated intent continually to question received ideas, customary arrangements, and natural orders as they are embodied in mythical figures of diverse sorts, from the Virgin Mary to the cannibal cradle-snatcher. Warner's focus on the power of stories and her insistence on their importance in the individual lives of women have prompted me to investigate four of her non-fiction works and four of her novels in order to demonstrate how myths–stories that are told to us over the course of our lives, cultural myths of our own and other cultures, family stories, stories from religious texts, fables, fairy tales–affect all of our daily lives more than we ever imagine, and on a continuous basis.

In order to discuss how myths affect women's personal lives, I proceed from the assumption that each one of us constructs what I will call a personal myth system, using as the raw material the stories we have heard over the course of our lives. These "stories" are a conglomeration of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, Biblical stories from Sunday school, ancient myths from bygone civilisations, stories circulating in society at large (for example, those about public figures, politics, eccentric people, dramatic events, natural catastrophes, etc.), and, finally, the stories that circulate in any extended family grouping about its history and its individual members. I am convinced that people's personal myth

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[13] The poem appears as number 1129 in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Boston and Toronto, Little, Brown, 1960).

systems are not based on only one belief system, except in the most rare and extreme cases, but on a bricolage of religious myths, societal myths, and familial myths that has many facets. Any one or more of these can become very influential in someone's life for any given reason, and for any length of time. An article by the French intellectual Félix Guattari, which Warner mentions at the conclusion of her exhaustive study *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, offers some pertinent insights on the construction of a personal myth system. Writing about the production of subjectivity in our current world, Guattari delineates three pathways or voices that the innumerable apparatuses of subjectification have produced. These pathways are: paths/voices of power (from the outside); paths/voices of knowledge (articulating themselves from within subjectivity using technoscientific and economic pragmatics); and paths/voices of self-reference (developing a processual subjectivity that defines its own coordinates and is self-consistent). To Guattari, these three paths/voices are continually entwining, confronting each other, and producing new figures. He stresses that any defining model must renounce universalist pretensions and map only real existing territories in relation to carefully set out areas and periods. Guattari finds this relativism useful, because it allows for the peculiarities of the third path/voice, that of creative, transforming, self-reference, in which discursive links do not obey the logics of larger and institutional discursive ensembles. According to Guattari, "self-reference is the most singular, the most contingent path/voice, the one that anchors human realities in finitude . . . it is the most universal one, the one that effects the most startling crossings between heterogeneous domains (Guattari 20). This path/voice operates to activate existential crystallisations–identity, the excluded

middle, causality, sufficient reason, continuity–which lie outside the fundamental principles of classical reason and are themselves derived from elements like lived time, obsessive refrains, identificational emblems, transitional objects, fetishes of various kinds and so on. Guattari sees a continuum of rituals that run from children's games "through the complex cartographies of myth and art, all the way to the sumptuous speculative edifices of theology and philosophy, which have sought to apprehend these same dimensions of existential creativity" (Guattari 36-7n2). I believe that his findings support my argument about the artificiality of boundaries between myth, politics, and religion, and that his continuum is a useful way of explaining how certain elements constitute a personal myth system. Moreover, Guattari goes on to add a political agenda to his discussion on subjectivity. In conclusion, he argues that what he terms worldwide integrated capitalism is presently committed to controlling subjective production through its apparatuses of power and knowledge, and to consigning technical, scientific and artistic innovations to the most reactionary and retrograde aspects of society. However, he believes that other modalities of subjective production are conceivable and possible, and wishes that those concerned with social progress take questions of subjectivity production seriously:

> The subjectivity of power does not fall from the sky. It is not written into our chromosomes that divisions of knowledge and labor must necessarily lead to the hideous segregations humanity now suffers. Unconscious figures of power and knowledge are not universals. They are tied to reference myths profoundly anchored in the psyche, but they can still swing

around toward liberatory paths/voices (Guattari 35).[14]

Warner uses a section of this quote to bolster her own political premise in her fairy tale study: "The story itself becomes the weapon of the weaponless" (Warner, *Beast* 412). She also applauds Guattari, along with Karel Čapek and Angela Carter, for their conviction that the creative enchantment of story-telling can achieve social change. She notes that Guattari looks for a move from the consensual media era to the dissensual postmedia era, and along with Guattari, hopes for an utopian transformation of our planet into a universe of creative enchantments.

Guattari does not make distinctions between myth and religion, but Warner at times appears to propose such a separation. Warner says that she, like Plato, does not look for a salvation springing from religious roots. She notes that the word religion comes from the root word 'lego' to bind, which designates the binding effect of religious practices, but myths, on the contrary, are not a matter of faith. However, she also seems to conflate the two under the category of the "irrational" when she explains how she eventually arrived at scepticism through her Catholic education:

> We were wrapped in stories, in signs and wonders, in fantasies, myths and dreams . . . The education stamped me with an abiding irrepressible interest in the irrational, both as an expression of the mind in its most mysterious mode, and as a terrifying force in history" (Warner, "Seeking" 62).

These somewhat conflicting statements point out the difficulties of drawing a boundary

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[14] Félix Guattari's article "Regimes, Pathways, Subjects" appeared in *Incorporations: Zone 6*, (Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, eds., New York, Zone, 1992).

between myth and religion. Many noted scholars–for example Mircea Eliade, who published countless texts on mythology over his lifelong career–have not attempted to differentiate them, and I shall follow their example. Roland Barthes would certainly support the notion of the binding effects of cultural myths, and I believe that Warner might also agree that myths do have the capacity to bind a society in much the same ways that religions do. After all, anyone's religion can be seen as a myth by someone else, no matter what era or culture is in question. Warner herself believes

> that myths are not always delusions, that deconstructing them does not necessarily mean wiping them, but that they can represent ways of making sense of universal matters, like sexual identity and family relations, and that they enjoy a more vigorous life than we perhaps acknowledge, and exert more of an inspiration and influence than we think. (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiii)

This seems a useful way to approach the notion of myth, in conjunction with some of the ideas put forward by Roberto Calasso, in his extraordinary postmodern meditation on Greek myth.[15] He states that it is only the obtuse who argue that there must be a notion of belief in connection with myth. Calasso considers that Plato and Socrates had an appropriate notion of the nature of myth, followed by those he considers the more lucid of the modern scholars: "we enter the mythical when we enter the realm of risk, and myth is the enchantment we generate in ourselves at such moments. More than a belief, it is a

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[15] Calasso's postmodern and fascinating text on myth, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (Toronto, Vintage, 1994), is a playful, evanescent, meditative labyrinth of a book on myth, rather than a static theoretical exposition.

magical bond that tightens around us. It is a spell the soul casts on itself" (Calasso 279). He puts forward a persuasive argument that mythographers are always in a permanent state of chronological vertigo; no mythographer has ever put mythic material into a consistent sequence, even though they all set out to impose an orderly framework. Calasso writes of the mythical gesture as a wave, which assumes a shape as it breaks, then dissolves into an undertow of unvanquished complications, a disorder from which the next mythical gesture will emerge. "So myth allows of no system," he states unequivocally (Calasso 281). Another characteristic of myth, to Calasso, is the process whereby the stories take on a life of their own–a claim that is proven again and again in Warner's investigations. In ancient Greece, woolen strips (for the most part red and white) signified an increased intensity in life calling for celebration and/or a search for meaning (for example, honour, death, victory, sacrifice, marriage, prayer, initiation, possession, purification, mourning). These strips were symbols that were tied to arms, heads, tree branches, utensils, statues, ships, or other places that seemed appropriate for the occasion. According to Calasso, the modern equivalents of these strips surround us now, but are largely ignored. He believes that the strips were indications of "the invisible net which enfolds the world, which descends from heaven to earth, binding the two together and swaying in the breeze"; they were a way of expressing "the connection of everything with everything else, which alone gives meaning to life," which we still feel at certain times when we intuit being part of "a stream that flows toward something unknown" (Calasso 284, 285). Calasso deplores later Greek beliefs that saw worldly existence as a burden from which one should desire to escape, a view which eventually led to a Christian focus

on heaven and rejection of earthly things (including Christ in his human aspect). He sees the present age as one in which we practise a retreat from the world, from whatever ethical stance, and are thus freed to use it and transform it ruthlessly. To Calasso, the distinction between myth and any other type of narrative is that the myth includes its opposite, even if all the variants of the myth have been lost: "Myths are made up of actions that include their opposites within themselves. The hero kills the monster, but even as he does so we perceive that the opposite is also true: the monster kills the hero. The hero carries off the princess, yet even as he does we perceive that the opposite is also true: the hero deserts the princess" (Calasso 281). In the end, Calasso states "A life in which the gods are not invited isn't worth living. It will be quieter, but there won't be any stories" (Calasso 387). Warner likely would agree, for she notes that her childhood experiences of stories "gave me a powerful sense of the presence of myth within diverse material" (Warner, "Seeking" 63). Calasso's book advocates the same attention to myth that Warner urges when she says "I have always thought that readers'–or viewers'–ability to disagree with a point of view or an argument and diverge from the prevailing tide of opinion is constantly being underestimated," and insists on "the shaping energy of myth on historical events themselves, as they occur and, above all, as they are reported, received and disseminated" (Warner, "Seeking" 63). Overall, Warner seeks to find what she calls "the slanted truth . . . the tension and the kinship between story and history, which in many languages is expressed by the same word–*la storia, l'histoire*" (Warner, "Seeking" 63). Warner's explorations of myth have resulted in a writing career in which she has demonstrated again and again that the energy of myth does shape historical events,

beginning with her first book, a historical study titled *The Dragon Empress*.

In the following three chapters, I will examine the first four non-fiction texts Warner published, and the four novels she has published to date. Chapter Two will focus on *The Dragon Empress*, *Alone of All Her Sex*, *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook*, and *Joan of Arc*, all texts which delineate female figures internationally famous over many centuries. Here, I will explore Warner's depictions of these legendary women to discover how their own personal myth systems were constructed and affected their lives (excepting the Virgin Mary), how the myths surrounding them grew, proliferated, were disseminated, and changed according to the exigencies of time and place, and how Warner's portrayals of them have entered into the debates around these figures. Chapter Three will examine Warner's first two novels, which both include the ways in which British notions of the Other–the exotic–affect the personal myth systems of British individuals and their interactions among their family members. Here, I will show how the personal myth systems of the main characters change over the course of the novel, demonstrating my argument that myth affects our daily lives to a greater degree than we often realise, and is often *the* driving force behind our actions and decisions. In Chapter Four, Warner's latest two novels provide an opportunity to examine the myths that grow and change around family members, the ways that family histories are constructed from these myths, and the way that family myths influence how people fit into their own and foreign cultures. In fictionalised accounts of Warner's own family histories, she examines family migrations and how they have affected various members of her family from the past to the present time. These novels also offer an opportunity to explore Warner's views on how myths

trigger migrations and colonisations, and travel across oceans to intermingle with myths of other cultures. Here again, myths affect the decisions and actions of individuals, and are critical agents in the processes through which these individuals come to perceive themselves and construct their subjectivity. In a brief concluding chapter, I will focus on Warner's political aims, and the efficacy of her work in promoting social change.

For Now, Forever: Four Mythic Women

> For there are three things in nature, which, if they transgress the limits of their own conditions, whether by diminution or by excess, attain to the highest pinnacle whether of goodness or evil. These are the tongue, the ecclesiastic and the woman; all these are commonly best of all, so long as they are guided by a good spirit, but worst of all, if guided by an evil spirit.
>
> Johann Nider

Marina Warner's four earliest non-fiction studies show us the ways in which mythologies have grown and proliferated around four extraordinary female figures. Academically fearless, Warner has focused on dauntingly vast topics: the Empress Tz'u-hsi (ruler of China for almost half a century), the Virgin Mary, Queen Victoria, and Joan of Arc. Myths arose around three of these women while they were alive, and all of them continue to play an active role as mythological figures up to the present day. Warner accomplishes her studies of the myths around these larger-than-life figures through her usual extensive and meticulous historical research, coupled with her ever-present attention to art. Her two-fold approach allows her to examine the historical contexts of the lives of the women themselves (with the obvious exception of the Virgin Mary), as well as the myths disseminated around them over time.

These studies all reflect Warner's academic and political convictions, as well as her own lifelong dreams. Her meticulous historical research leads her to myth in every case, as she carefully examines how the stories and legends around each of these women are

interwoven with social contexts and illuminate social dynamics. The figures she chooses to study are all strong women, and researching the myths around them certainly must have worked toward satisfying what Warner described to her interviewer Williams as a lifelong passion for the figure of the wild woman "who has access to something powerful. I think that has stayed with me always" (Williams 261). Warner's stated interest in the ways in which women are controlled, the apparatuses of masculine power, and how histories and national identities are constructed and represented, is evident in these texts. Present as well are her efforts to help uncover an ancestry of foremothers, not through idealisation, pity, or blame, but through careful, historical research into the cultural contexts in which they lived, to discover how the myths around them were constructed. Warner firmly situates these women, and/or their mythic personae, within patriarchal culture, as opposed to imagining them existing apart from or outside it. In these four texts, Warner carries through the feminist work she promotes in her articles on women's history. Moreover, she strongly supports her claim that the energy of myth shapes historical events, not only as they happen, but even more as they are related, received, and disseminated. She also extends the symbols of women available to us by pointing to overlooked or unrecognised connections between myth, cultural symbols and social realities, and always presents her perceptions in ways which undermine accepted beliefs and introduce previously unasked questions.

The Dragon Empress

Warner's first published book, *The Dragon Empress: Life and Times of Tz'u-hsi 1835-1908 Empress Dowager of China*, is an historical study of a woman who rose from

obscurity to become the dowager empress of China during the latter years of the Ch'ing or Manchu dynasty. Ruling China for nearly fifty years during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Tz'u-hsi gradually became a terrifying and all-powerful figure around whom many legends flourished. Her awareness of the awesome range of her political power, and a considerable amount of self-confidence, are revealed when she states:

> Do you know I have often thought that I am the cleverest woman who ever lived and that others cannot compare with me. Although I have heard much about Queen Victoria and read a part of her life . . . still I don't think her life is half as interesting and eventful as mine. Now look at me, I have 400 million people all dependent on my judgement (Warner, *Empress* epigraph).

Clearly, Tz'u-hsi had developed a personal myth system which placed her at the top of the ladder when it comes to power. Others came to place her there as well, but her statement emphasises the historical fact that Warner's research makes clear; her power was largely brought about and consolidated by herself. Warner does not specify when the Empress made her comments, but she does mention that in her old age Tz'u-hsi was delighted to have outlived Queen Victoria.

When she began this first historical study, Warner was working for *Vogue* magazine and asked for time off to write it. She initially wanted her first book to be a novel, but was persuaded by her publisher to do a non-fiction study.[1] Her research for the book was the springboard for her career as a writer and she "has been a workaholic ever

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[1] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

since" (Williams 264). As a child, she had been inspired by a character in a comic strip–a Chinese emperor who flew around on a carpet–to think of China as "*the* fabulous country" (Zabus " Spinning" 521). China, Warner's dream of the Other, was partly fostered by her father's intense interest in history. She was also very attracted to China's antiquity, its value system, which promoted the poet and writer over the soldier (in one Chinese fairy tale, Cinderella marries a scholar) and the Chinese notion of writing practised as a magic art or divination. Moreover, she found Confucianism, with its focus on inviting a person to become a moral human being, more compelling than Catholicism, based on the notion of sacrifice.[2] Warner's early interest in China was heightened by Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* (a seven-volume work published from 1954 onward) where he contends that "scientific inquiry in China, which frequently synchronised with Western advances, was often led by spiritual desire rather than practical considerations" (Williams 264). She explained that she was also inspired by Irène Andreae's studies of the Jesuits in China. After publishing *The Dragon Empress*, Warner turned down a Fulbright scholarship to learn Chinese and went to China in 1975, to discover that the magical China of her imagination had in reality other less appealing aspects.[3] She found that China is and was in many ways "a horrendous place of oppression" (Zabus, "Spinning" 522). It was while working on this first publication that Warner developed the methodology that has made all of her texts so fascinating: her combined focus on myth, historical research, art, and the realities of women's lives.

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[2] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

[3] Ibid.

Warner's methodology is similar in many ways to the materialist feminist criticism of literature and culture proposed by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, although that text was not published until 1985. In their preface to this essay collection, they speak of a "commitment to the view that the social and economic circumstances in which women and men live–the material conditions of their lives–are central to an understanding of culture and society" (Newton and Rosenfelt xi). Later, they outline the work entailed in constructing such a theoretical position:

> [W]ork on the power relations implied by gender and simultaneously on those implied by class, race and sexual identification; an analysis of literature and an analysis of history and society; and analysis of the circumstances of cultural production and analysis of the complexities with which at a given moment in history they are inscribed in the text (Newton and Rosenfelt xix).

Materialist feminism has gone through other incarnations before and after Newton and Rosenfelt's theoretical intervention into the debates, but their formulation is useful in a discussion of Warner's texts. Their materialist feminist criticism is wary of separating language and ideas from other areas of struggle. Warner also insists on embedding social and historical realities in her texts, linking myths, legends and art to historical facts and the realities of daily life, particularly for women, in her writing, whether fiction or non-fiction.

Warner's study of Tz'u-hsi produces an extremely detailed account of the physical surroundings, appurtenances, appearances, and customs of the life of the legendary

empress, from her birth as Lan Kuei (Little Orchid) in 1835 to her death in 1908 as retired ruler of a dynasty which outlasted her for a bare three years. She outlines the historical setting in which Tz'u-hsi's reign took place. Warner explains that in 1835 China was at the height of its nineteenth-century glory, accepting tribute from the surrounding countries of Annam, Laos, Burma, Nepal, Korea, the Rukukyu Islands, Sulu, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Turkestan. According to Warner, it was through Western military action, Western commercial, industrial, and economic ethics, and the philosophies and strategies of individual competition, so alien to the Confucian framework, that China's powers were lost by the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, Tz'u-hsi assumed power as China ruled the far east, and died as Chinese domination there ended. Warner points out that China's power in this period appeared to be "not by might but by the right of culture, brilliantly and civilly administered by principles developed for itself and by itself" (Warner, *Empress* 9). Despite the fact that she was writing this book in the early 1970s, Warner is as careful as any scholar versed in the post-colonial theorising which developed over the next several decades, to address the complexities of Chinese society when Tz'u-hsi was alive, and the realities of her life as a Chinese woman of that era. However, Warner also adds an extra dimension to this materialist feminist study. Integrated into the portrayal of the historical events of the times, is Warner's in-depth exploration of the mythological framework through which Tz'u-hsi viewed her world, and ways in which her personal myth system affected the course of history.

The young Tz'u-hsi, according to Warner, was determined to educate herself in the face of her family's relatively lowly station in life and the non-education of women (no

matter what their class) that was considered appropriate at the time. Her strong-mindedness over her learning is characteristic of her later determination to take advantage of any opportunities that came her way. Tz'u-hsi somehow managed to acquire the rudiments of reading and writing, despite a total lack of formal education, by the time she was sixteen. She lived for much of her childhood in the southern province of Anhwei at Wuhu, on the Yangtze River near Shanghai, where her father was posted. However, because he was a Manchu and a person of rank, his daughters were eligible for service in the Forbidden City as maidservants or concubines for the Emperor, who was absolutely forbidden to consort with any but Manchu women.

Warner outlines how the Manchu ways of thinking were part of Tz'u-hsi's personal myth system. The warlike Manchu had invaded Peking and usurped the rule of the Ming dynasty in 1644. Since then, the Manchu had chosen to maintain their ethnic differences and remain foreigners, conducting government business bilingually in Manchu and Chinese. They were forbidden to intermarry with Chinese people, and to become tradesmen or merchants. Segregated by hereditary privilege and caste from the otherwise egalitarian population, they fostered differentiations between themselves and the Chinese. Manchu males shaved their heads and wore a queue, and Manchu women's feet were unbound. Over the next two centuries, the ruling Manchu became physically indistinguishable from the Chinese. By the time of Tz'u-hsi, the Manchu language became one learned only as a formality, and, for practical purposes, the language of the government was Chinese. Nevertheless, the cultural and familial myths of racial superiority ingrained in her as a child remained with Tz'u-hsi all her life, for she never ceased to

question people's racial origins and to make patronising comments about the Chinese. She also promoted less able Manchu applicants over more qualified Chinese to positions of power. Myths of past Manchu glories, folk heroes, legendary soldiers, and military exploits collided with Chinese wisdom and Confucian pacifism for Tz'u-hsi. Although the Manchu, the warrior colonisers, had been colonised in turn by the Chinese and turned toward intellectual pursuits, Tz'u-hsi was shocked by what she perceived as the degeneracy of the former Manchu spirit and she longed for its revival and a return to a recognition of the Manchu martial valour, despite the education in Confucian philosophy she acquired when she came to the Emperor's court.

When Hsien-feng succeeded his father as Emperor after the latter's death in 1851, Tz'u-hsi and her sister were summoned to the Forbidden City as possible concubines. Her sister was rejected, but Tz'u-hsi was appointed a concubine of the fifth and lowest rank on 14 June 1852. On 27 April, 1952, at the age of twenty, she furthered her opportunities by bearing the Emperor (so far the father of a sole daughter, and husband to a barren Empress) a baby, who proved to be the Emperor's only son. Promoted to concubine of the second rank. Tz'u-hsi was on her path to becoming a force in international politics, and her education provided the foundations of her personal myth system which was to have a dramatic effect on the world stage in the latter part of her rule. Always enterprising and surrounded by well-stocked libraries, archives of state records, and art collections, she continued her earlier assiduous pursuit of education by studying Chinese classics and history, and practising calligraphy. Warner goes into considerable detail in her discussion of Tz'u-hsi's studies, and her discussions of the philosophies influencing Tz'u-hsi provide

fascinating portrayals of myth actively influencing the course of history. Through her exploration of Tz'u-hsi's ways of making sense of her world, Warner makes visible what she terms "the shaping energy of myth on historical events themselves" (Warner, "Seeking" 63).

According to Warner, the scholarly writings Tz'u-hsi would have studied included works and edited works by Confucius and Mencius, and the historical records of the Twenty-Four Dynasties. Warner notes that there was no distinction in China at that time between religious and secular teachings, so that scholars were teachers of morality and their writings and interpretations held a sacred validity. It was at this time that Tz'u-hsi acquired the knowledge that was the basis of what Warner terms her later orthodox genius:

> The vision in these works that Tz'u-hsi now pored over focused on Heaven, the emperor and the family, all interconnected by an explicit set of duties and prescribed relationships. Heaven (*T'ien*) the force that ordered the cosmos, was no personal god. Although emperors slaughtered animals in sacrifice at the Temple of Heaven until 1915, they were not idolaters, but worshipped an abstract concept of universal harmony in nature (Warner, *Empress* 35).

Rulers, according to Confucian philosophy, ruled by solicitude and moral persuasion, not force, and heaven rewarded them with tranquillity and order among their subjects. However, as Tz'u-hsi learned, Confucianism was sufficiently pragmatic that it advocated discipline and punishment, which justified the oppressive and bloody crushing of revolt.

She used the Confucian doctrine of filial piety to her advantage as well, justifying her lengthy rule because of her relationship to the ancestors of the family into which she married. She mastered the Confucian classics to use them for her own ends, and had a better knowledge of the elaborate and complex rules of etiquette than many of the Chinese surrounding her. These rules were prescribed as social norms intended to create harmony between man and nature, and they effectively regulated Chinese society:

> All official and personal relationships–between ruler and subject, prince and minister, father and son, husband and wife, between brothers and between friends–were formalized, and everyone within the hierarchy was made thoroughly aware and sensitive to the requirements and procedure of his position. All encounters were managed by the book . . .(*Empress* 40)

This traditional and established myth system operating in the Chinese court of the times, which Warner terms Confucian agnosticism, was a cultural myth system that Tz'u-tsi imbibed with her classical learning. However, Warner explains that although Tz'u-hsi did conform outwardly to this rigid set of rules–and there is no doubt that she was expert in manipulating it to her political ends–it remained a superficial veneer to her, which wore thin in her later life. The more mystic religions of Taoism and Buddhism with which she grew up were an early and unshakeable part of her personal myth system, and they operated more and more strongly as she grew older. According to Warner, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism all agreed in pursuing harmony between man and nature, but disagreed on other issues. Where Confucian thought advocated active participation in society and material efforts to better the life of the family, Buddhism promoted withdrawal

from the world, the family, and materialism, and Taoism advised the spontaneous expression of the instincts, unmediated by education. Tz'u-hsi, according to Warner, always retained her attachment to the beliefs in Buddhism and magic that she had imbibed as a child, which Warner characterises as more "primitive" than the "moral sententiousness of much of Confucian doctrine" (Warner, *Empress* 41). The latter, according to Warner, appeared almost inhumanly efficient, and this characteristic was balanced, for Tz'u-hsi, by the superstitions of her childhood religions. Warner shows how these beliefs were augmented by her cultural beliefs to form the personal myth system that influenced Tz'u-hsi's political decisions and ended up significantly affecting world politics.

Tz'u-hsi's political ideas were based on a complete ignorance of the world outside China and her view of foreign affairs was based on cultural myths. These included the beliefs expressed in official documents of the time that Europeans were "barbarians from the Western Ocean" who were popularly termed "red-haired barbarians," big-nosed hairy ones," or "foreign devils" (Warner, *Empress* 44). Such a combination of vanity and ignorance on the part of the Chinese had disastrous results during the Opium Wars with England from 1839-42. Tz'u-hsi arrived at court a decade later. She gained access to power due to her curiosity, energy, and enthusiasm for politics and the willingness of the indolent Emperor to allow her to participate in political decision-making, despite the objections of his ministers. By that time, China was committed to treaties with foreign powers very detrimental to Chinese interests, and the Hakka Peasants Revolt was brewing. Tz'u-hsi was adamantly committed to crushing both the unruliness of Chinese subjects, and agreed with the Chinese ministers that foreign demands were to be resisted with force.

The English and French notion that 'free trade plus Christianity equals civilization' was unthinkable to both Tz'u-hsi and the Chinese court, but Chinese martial resistance to the foreigners eventually resulted in the ruins of what once was a powerful China. To Tz'u-hsi, the foreigners were akin to the rebels and both should be crushed by war to the death. By 1860, French and British pillaging, looting, and razing had indelibly convinced her that foreigners were indeed brute beasts. This conviction was to bear fruit after the Emperor died in 1861. Because Tz'u-hsi presented their son to him on his deathbed, the Emperor proclaimed the child Emperor after him. His widow, the Empress Niauhuru and Tz'u-hsi thus both became Empresses Dowager upon the Emperor's death, and the wealth resulting from their status ensured their absolute power. At this point, they were seen as malleable figureheads, which Niuhuru was, but Tz'u-hsi was quite the reverse.

As time went by, Tz'u-hsi's energy and cleverness might have helped to create a stronger China, but certain beliefs embedded in her personal myth system precipitated political disaster, and caused rumours and legends to proliferate around her. Instead of allowing minority groups within China to diverge from the ways of the Confucianist empire with its ruling Manchu elite, Tz'u-hsi remained committed to enforcing cultural, religious, and social hegemony through military suppression of difference. Her admiration of her own warlike Manchu culture led her to surround herself with Chinese soldiers. Widespread rumours attested to a longstanding sexual relationship between her and a Manchu military commander, whom she appointed to the highest political posts in the country despite his lack of education and political acumen. Rumours also flew that she had deliberately corrupted his son, who died at nineteen of smallpox in 1875, having ruled less

than two years. Tz'u-hsi quickly and very unscrupulously engineered her three-year-old nephew's succession, and ruled in his stead. Tz'u-hsi's daughter-in-law committed suicide shortly after her husband's death, leaving Tz'u-hsi firmly in control once again. In her despotic way, brooking no contrary opinions from wiser councillors whom she replaced with sycophants, she continued her warring efforts against foreign countries, leading China into a series of military defeats and political failures. Led by the convictions of her personal myth system, Tz'u-hsi as a ruler became more and more of a detriment to her country. Tz'u-hsi had a consuming passion for popular theatre, and her favourite heroine was Mu-lan, who led military troops into battle disguised in her father's armour. Her addiction to the Manchu warrior mythology, and her insular notion that China was infinitely more powerful than any foreign nation, made her blind to foreign encroachments in China until far too late.

Tz'u-hsi continued her rule for two years beyond the age of majority of her nephew, but eventually had to cede him the throne in1889. As she grew older in retirement, despite her still powerful position, she was more distanced from politics and retreated more into her personal life. She occupied herself visiting the extensive palace gardens that she had caused to be constructed, pursuing her lifelong enjoyment of painting. Her passion for theatrical performances became all-important to her. So, too, did the religious beliefs of her childhood: "nature-worshipping Taoism and divinatory Buddhism" (Warner, *Empress* 167). Consultations with astrologers, fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, and augurers connected Tz'u-hsi with the superstitious ceremonies and taboos of her early life, and the Confucianism of the Chinese court was relegated to the

background as her political role declined. Warner explains that Tz'u-hsi found Buddhism particularly appealing because its pantheon included women, women could become priests, and women were not discriminated against as they were in the sexist rules of Confucianism. Fate and luck became all-important, as her despotic rule left her in a lonely position, without confidants or trustworthy advisors, and reliant on astrologers and fortune-tellers. Her reliance on superstition, according to Warner, rendered Tz'u-hsi absolutely politically ineffective during the Boxer Rebellion. By this time she was in her mid-sixties and quite credulous, and she was attracted to the Boxers' claims to invulnerability and their dramatic behaviour. Refusing to repudiate the Boxers, she created a climate of indecision which proved disastrous. After protracted battles involving imperial troops, Boxers, foreign troops, and Chinese troops in various combinations and confrontations,

Tz'u-hsi was eventually forced to flee Peking ignominiously in late 1900. She took with her the Emperor and his wife, but had his favourite concubine thrown down a well and drowned when the latter begged her to remain in the capital to preserve the honour of the dynasty and the safety of the empire. She returned in 1902, to ceremoniously receive foreigners and institute reforms, but since China was by this time virtually bankrupt, many of her initiatives failed. As she grew older, her commitment to Buddhism continued to increase to the point that the Dalai Lama came to pay homage to her on the last birthday of her life. Tz'u-hsi had appointed her third child successor to an Emperor in 1907, and the second Emperor she had appointed died on 14 November, 1908. Rumour had it that she had possibly had him poisoned, fearing that if she died first he might reveal the

unsavoury secrets behind his succession as Emperor. Warner explains that there is "no evidence except gossip and conjecture to point to Tz'u-hsi's last possible crime" (Warner, *Empress* 261). Nevertheless, her nephew the Emperor was the last in a series of deaths that history has attributed to her. Tz'u-hsi died the day after the Emperor, 15 November, 1908.

Finding only anecdotal evidence of Tz'u-hsi's alleged crimes, Warner chooses to reserve judgement as to whether Tz'u-hsi committed all the horrifying deeds and murders attributed to her. She comments that the innumerable plays which Tz'u-hsi so loved to attend were filled with "so many villainous mothers who ruin their sons' lives and murder their daughters-in-law, so many tyrants who usurp the throne, so many favourite concubines and lovelorn emperors, so many intrigues about succession, that it is a wonder Tz'u-hsi did not bellow for the house lights" (Warner, *Empress* 175). She speculates that perhaps these plays provided the bases for the many street scandals that proliferated about Tz'u-hsi, or that perhaps life imitated art, as Tz'u-hsi. Overall, Warner presents Tz'u-hsi, committed to myth and magic as she was, as a mythical figure in her own right. But she shows how this apparently tyrannical, despotic, murderous, and completely ruthless woman was not a monstrous aberration, but a product of her culture and her times. Warner has chosen to show how the effects of Tz'u-hsi's personal myth system were felt in countries which she had never seen and among people whose cultural myth systems were unimaginable to her. This particular aspect of Tz'u-hsi's life is reflected later in Warner's first novel, *In a Dark Wood*. However, the year before that novel was published, Warner undertook another historical study which not only contributed significantly to *Dark Wood*,

but also became a landmark text for feminist religious studies.

Alone of All Her Sex

Warner's second publication, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, is a second historical study. With no access to historical artefacts from the life of Mary the Nazarene, Warner focused on the myths proliferating around the figure of the biblical Mary. Looking back at the project in 1990, two decades later, Warner writes in an afterword:

> The hubris of youth astonishes me: now I feel that a single strand of something like the cult of the Virgin takes years to unravel, and the work can only be incomplete, whereas then, like Jack in the fairy-tale, I looked up at the giant beanstalk and thought nothing of leaping up it (Williams 259).

Some critics did fault Warner for being a lightweight, blithely entering deep waters into areas where more experienced scholars ventured only with great caution. However, her study provided refreshing new insights into age-old images, and critics applauded the elegance and persuasiveness of her style[4] and the meticulousness of her research. At the time of writing the book, she had been a features editor for Vogue magazine and a broadcasting contributor. She had been praised for this work, with the *Daily Telegraph* naming her Young Writer of the Year in 1971. Earlier, Warner had won the W. H. Smith Poetry Prize at the age of fourteen, and had also edited the student magazine *Isis* while

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[4] Warner chooses to use the Protestant King James Authorized Version of the Bible in her book because its imagery and cadences are so integral to the English language, and its strength and beauty are so marked (Warner, *Alone* xv).

she was at Oxford. It was mainly because she lacked a specifically academic track record that scholars felt free to attack her deconstruction of this sacred icon with comments that she encapsulates for interviewer Elaine Williams: "What is a woman from *Vogue* doing taking on the Church?" (Williams 259).

Her reasons for researching this study, unlike her reasons for her study of Tz'u-hsi, are quite clearly stated and quite clearly political. Raised a Roman Catholic, and educated in Belgian and English convents, Warner takes a very personal approach to begin her book and emphatically foregrounds her feminist stance. She outlines her childhood attempts to dedicate herself to Mary and to emulate her chastity, humility, and gentleness in thought, word, and deed. To her and the other convent students, "holiness" was a natural part of living, and praying a continual activity. However, praying was interspersed with schoolgirl giggles about words in the prayers such as "bosom." Warner comments that other Christians are frequently taken aback by Catholic frivolity over religion, and terms this childhood holiness shallow, even though each student imagined that she could experience the vocation to become a nun at any time. She explains this paradox by noting that the Catholic religion is one of simple certainties, outlined in the Catechism, with the Virgin Mary being the chief of these certainties: "She was the culmination of womanhood. As my agnostic father maintained, it was a good religion for a girl" (Warner, *Alone* xx). Here, Warner is outlining the deliberate and systematic construction of a personal myth system as instituted by the Catholic Church. The success of this system is popularly acknowledged in the statement attributed to the Church, proposing that a child raised in the Catholic faith until the age of seven will be a Catholic for life. Warner herself wryly

concurs, "as they say, once a Catholic . . . " (Warner, "Seeking" 62).

For Warner, however, her Catholicism was not to be a lifelong commitment. She notes that during her last several years at school she began questioning doctrine. She likens the abandonment of her fervent Mariolatry to Orpheus's turning to look at Eurydice when bringing her from the kingdom of Hades. Her doubts, like his, severed a bond that could only endure through faith. Warner speaks of being in "absolute misery" during puberty, as she was confronted with the Church's demand for sexual chastity (Warner, *Alone* xxi). The connection between myth and sexuality that Warner makes in this 1976 text is one that Jamake Highwater makes over a decade later when he proposes that the body is constantly transformed by the flux of a mythic mentality. He states:

> Through the study of sexuality as a manifestation of people's most fundamental mythic visions of themselves, we are led to question not just the literal truth of our own religious cosmogony, but also to discover a need to reassess the countless scientific and social values, standards, and codes of behaviour which inevitably arise from mythology and which have become extensions of that mythology in the form of social conventions in the modern world of "commodification," industry, and science. We cannot discover what we are becoming until we can see who we have been. We cannot discover the values emanating from a new mythology until we recognize the possibility that the truth of mythology is not fixed and singular but pluralistic and malleable (Highwater 26-7).

Highwater might have been writing a prescription for Warner's book on the cult of Mary.[5] Although she could not articulate her feelings when she first doubted, she could never accept that "concupiscence–at least in its narrow sexual definition," was "the principal impulse of the devil in the soul" (Warner, *Alone* xxi). Thus, it was her experience of herself as a sexual being which led Warner to question her religious faith.

When she went to Oxford, Warner left the Catholic faith, a painful process for her which instigated her research on the cult of the Virgin. She states in her prologue: "I started with a simple question: what was it I had worshipped?" (Warner, *Alone* xxi). However, she retains a lifelong commitment to the meditative practices she was taught at the convent: examination of conscience and meditation on holy pictures. She comments to interviewer Williams: "These have remained completely part of my practice . . . That's exactly how I conduct my mental business all the time. We were given all these Mysteries and we were also taught to conjure them in our minds" (Williams 261). Warner writes how this conjuring works for her when she states that these practices "trained me to imagine scenes and their accompanying grief and /or pleasure with intense, inner vividness. If the writing is going well, I can feel I'm racing to transcribe in words a picture scrolling in front of my eyes" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 32). She was delighted to read of Italo Calvino's similar practice when he described his stories growing from images that had made an impact on him. Previously, she had imagined that "proper fiction should begin with Real Life" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 33). Here, Warner is clearly articulating how her

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[5] Jamake Highwater explains that his book *Myth and Sexuality* (New York and London, Meridian, 1991) resulted from years of thinking about this connection and his many conversations over time with his friends and his mentor Joseph Campbell.

own personal myth system–and a very early aspect of it–has influenced her writing career over her lifetime.

What Warner calls her "private journey" developed into the book that became a standard reference for any study of the cult of the Virgin Mary. She focuses on the various aspects that the Virgin has assumed at different times, and attempts to assess why these aspects were symbolically satisfying. Warner is convinced that the symbolic Virgin is a popular creation, formed and put into play for different reasons by different people, ranging from those occupying the very highest positions in society to those from society's very lowest echelons. To Warner, "A myth of such dimensions is not simply a story, or a collection of stories, but a magic mirror like the Lady of Shalott's, reflecting a people and the beliefs they produce, recount, and hold" (Warner, *Alone* xxiii). Warner feels that Mary belongs to an enormous community of people, representing a gradual accumulation of ideas, and that psychological theories are not sufficient to explain the persistence of her cult. She does not find the Freudian notion of men seeking a pure and completely dependable mother adequate. Nor does she concur with Jung's notion of archetypes, for she believes that mythical figures such as Mary are cultural and historical products, rather than innate aspects of the human mind. However, Warner does concur with the Jungian belief that such symbols do exercise significant influence over people's lives. To Warner, the Virgin Mary was an ordinary woman who gave birth to Christ and became the symbolic mother of the Church. Thus, she is involved in the personal salvation of anyone belonging to Christian history and professing Christian beliefs, and "stands as a model of perfect humanity" (Warner, *Alone* xxiii).

It is the latter aspect of Mary that triggers the extensive feminist deconstruction that Warner undertakes in her book. Warner explains that because Mary is the Church's female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified, the Church's attitudes to women render discussions of the Virgin problematic. The Church's unceasing ambivalence toward women is reflected, according to Warner, in its position that women are equal in God's eyes to men because they have an immortal soul, yet they are implacably placed in a subordinate position in the order of creation and society. Warner comments that the model Mary also portrays this ambivalence. She argues that Mary symbolises the Chinese principle of *yin*, which represents what western thought traditionally considers feminine qualities: "yieldingness, softness, gentleness, receptiveness, mercifulness, tolerance, withdrawal" (Warner, *Alone* xxiv). Warner finds it problematic that western thought equates the feminine with actual females, and insists that members of the female sex be feminine according to its definition of the word. She prefers the view held by the Chinese, and Jung as well, that the principles of *yin* and *yang* (the term given by the Chinese to what Western thought considers feminine and masculine qualities) "must be present in the whole individual in balanced measure," whether that individual is female or male (Warner, *Alone* xxiv). A further development of Warner's critique of the Church's philosophies is her delineation of the difference between Buddhism and Catholicism:

> In Buddhism created things at their highest point of fulfilment merge and flow back into nothingness, where all form is obliterated. This is one view of wholeness. The Catholic world's view could not be more opposite. It longs for the formal, immutable, invincible, constant, unchanging perfection of each resurrected

individual. For its most sublime example, it looks to the assumed Virgin (Warner, *Alone* 102).

Warner appears to have developed a distinct preference for Buddhist philosophy, possibly as a result of her research into Buddhist teachings in connection with the life of Tz'u-hsi. Hegemonic struggles between these two mythologies becomes the major focus of her first novel, published the year after her study of Mariology appeared. This novel features the intersection of feminism with Roman Catholicism and Buddhism. It can be seen as a fictional exploration of the theoretical considerations in *Alone of All Her Sex*, for both texts reflect Warner's intense questioning of the nature of belief.

A quote from Claude Lévi-Strauss about how beliefs and customs are produced introduces Warner's prologue to *Alone*. He is convinced that we will never know the initial origin of beliefs and customs, and posits that social behaviour is not produced spontaneously by single individuals, under the influence of emotions of the moment. People do not act according to their feelings as individuals, but according to feelings which arise because of the ways in which they are permitted or obliged to act. To Lévi-Strauss, "Customs are given as external norms before giving rise to internal sentiments, and these non-sentient norms determine the sentiments of individuals as well as the circumstances in which they may, or must, be displayed"Warner, *Alone* xix). Writing from this perspective, Warner demonstrates how many attitudes and practices around the figure of Mary have been carefully programmed by cultural institutions, chiefly the Roman Catholic Church. It is thus an ambivalent, or even suspicious, approach that Warner takes to the figure of the Virgin Mary. She seeks to discover how and why the symbol of Mary

satisfied cultural needs at different times in history, following her conviction that the symbolic Virgin Mary "has been formed and animated by different people for different reasons, and is a truly popular creation" (Warner, *Alone* xxii). In sum, Warner notes, whether we see Mary as the epitome of the sublime and beautiful or the ultimate pitiable production of ignorance and superstition, she does represent a central theme in the history of Western attitudes to women: "She is one of the few female figures to have attained the status of myth–a myth that for nearly two thousand years has coursed through our culture, as spirited and often as imperceptible as an underground stream" (Warner, *Alone* xxv).

Warner chooses to examine the myth of Mary in five sections: Virgin, Queen, Bride, Mother, and Intercessor. Her study is lengthy and extremely detailed. Several themes that keep reappearing throughout her analysis of Mary's representations are ones that are pertinent to the notion of how women's personal myth systems are constructed, and how important these personal myth systems are in women's day-to-day lives. The major theme, a logical one considering Warner's own struggles to reconcile her sexuality and her religion, is the way representations of Mary have been used to control women's sexuality. Warner outlines how the Christian religion broadened the classical concept of virginity. Where virginity used to be powerful magic, conferring strength and ritual purity, Christianity proposed the virgin birth as the moral sanction of the goodness of sexual chastity: "And it was this shift, from virgin birth to virginity, from religious sign to moral doctrine, that transformed a mother goddess like the Virgin Mary into an effective instrument of asceticism and female subjection" (Warner, *Alone* 49). Rather than strength and autonomy, Mary's virginity was used by the Church to extol female chastity and

submission. The effects of the Church's use of Mary's virginity, as Warner notes, have been long-lasting and pervasive: "It is almost impossible to overestimate the effect that the characteristic Christian association of sex and sin and death has had on the attitudes of our civilization" (Warner, *Alone* 50). Warner goes on to elaborate how the connection between sex, sin, and death in Christian symbolism operates to entrap all Christian believers: "For if desire, as natural as breath or as sleep itself, is sinful, then the Christian, like a man in the grip of a usurer, must always run back to the Church, the only source of that grace which can give him reprieve" (Warner *Alone* 51). Later, Warner notes that the association of sex, sin, and death, though ancient, still is a major part of Christian symbolism, with the soul dying in lust just as the body rots in death, and spiritual corruption mirroring bodily dissolution. Christian ascetics promoted and spread the notion that flesh was the evil enemy of the spirit, and women were firmly situated alongside flesh, because of the function of childbearing. Women were mother and temptress together, as exemplified by Eve, while Mary was the opposite. The angel Gabriel's salutation to Mary, Ave, symbolically transposes Eve's name (Eva). Women's actual bodily functions, then, are inextricably tied to sin by the Church, and Warner's research highlights the fact that the association of holiness and physical virginity, which have influenced Christian notions of the dangers of the flesh and their connection with women, have been a significant part of the Marian cult from its Byzantine beginnings.

Warner focuses on a more complicated effect of representations of Mary on women's sexuality and Catholicism when she discusses the Biblical Song of Songs.[6] Here,

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[6] *Song of Solomon*.

she demonstrates how the lover of the Song came to be identified as Christ, and the beloved came to be seen as the Church, every Christian soul, and the Virgin Mary. The erotic imagery of St Bernard of Clairvaux in his eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, according to Warner, exposes an antinomy at the crux of Christian thinking. For Bernard, one expression of love–carnal desire–disfigures the otherwise pristine soul, but another–the leap of the soul toward God–restores the soul's primal resemblance to its Creator. The problem, to Warner, lies in the fact that both these expressions of love are voiced in the language used in the languorous and amorous biblical poem, the Song of Songs. Warner considers that Christian discipline is based on this tragic tension: "As the soul reaches for the embrace of her spouse, the mortal coil reasserts itself as her gaoler" (Warner, *Alone* 129). She notes that Bernard describes union with God in the same terms that Plato uses when he explains that mutual love arose because creatures were once cloven in two and each creature spends its life searching for its lost half, "endeavouring to combine two in one and heal the human sore" (Warner, *Alone* 133). However, the most immediate act of fusion possible for human beings, notes Warner, is expressly forbidden. The union of Christ and Mary was consummated in heaven; the love was a love deferred, and the love deferred was also a love denied. Mary can never achieve Christ's divinity, and she cannot be seen as his bride in any way that opens the door to interpretations which could include abuse and ribaldry. Thus, to Warner, the icon of Mary and Christ side by side is "one of the Christian Church's most polished deceptions: it is the very image and hope of earthly consummated love used to give that kind of love the lie. Its undeniable power and beauty do not heal: rather the human sore is chafed and exposed" (Warner,

Alone 133).

Another aspect of Warner's critique concerns representations of Mary which focus on her submission. Alongside the contempt and hatred induced by the interpretations of the Creation and the Fall, the idealisation of Mary submitting to God's will advocates humility for women, according to Warner. Together, these representations of Mary justify the Church's continuing refusal to allow women to act independently in its ministry. They cannot be priests, but must serve as wives, mothers, or nuns. Even as such, they cannot hope to approach the purity of Mary. Warner describes how such an image of such selfless perfection has a problem fulfilling one of the important functions of myth. She explains that myths blend with the history and community of a people in ways that afford a perspective on its beginnings and history. Mythological gods and heroes also can be viewed as personifications of natural forces which in turn are thought to be divinely instituted and organised. On a third level, according to Warner, a mythological figure "represents an aspect of the human mind, and the story in which he or she lives and suffers or triumphs is a psychological drama with timeless application" (Warner, *Alone* 225). It is on this level that the figure of Mary, faultless as she is, fails. Where classical gods and goddesses reflected all imaginable vices and virtues of human nature, Mary only reflects an absolutely inhuman perfection. Warner argues that the figure of St Mary Magdalene was introduced to provide the connection to the common human condition that the figure of Mary cannot. To Warner, the way the Christian Church has constructed and used these two figures allows no space for a concept of a woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore. For women, there must be consecrated chastity or regenerate sexuality, and nothing else.

Although the Virgin Mary's fruitfulness in bearing a child affirms the natural world, it, aligned with Catholic notions of purity and humility, only reinforces the bonds of what Warner calls "tedious biological teleology" (Warner, *Alone* 284). All of these and related issues are discussed in very powerful language, as Warner gives voice to concerns which have had a painful urgency for many women over time. Christian women have struggled to reconcile their realities with the religious expectations of the Church, while non-Christian women have been more or less seriously affected by the notions of womanhood that have been propagated world-wide by the Church. Moreover, Warner seeks to remind her readers that the construction of a myth such as the cult of Mary involves human agency.

Roland Barthes proposed that in myth, the memory of the way myths were once created gets lost, and that myth transforms history into nature. Warner applies his insights to the cult of the Virgin: "In the case of the Virgin Mary, faith has simply wiped out the silt of history in her myth. It is a surprise to believers and non-believers alike that she is rarely mentioned in the Gospels, and is not even always called Mary" (Warner, *Alone* 335). She explains how psychologists such as Jung have accepted and used the premise that the Virgin has existed from all eternity, thus colluding with the Church in the creation of a symbol so powerful that it acquires a life of its own. Her over-riding purpose is to demonstrate how and why "[t]he legends of the Bible are translated into ethics; myths become morals; stories precepts" (Warner, *Alone* 179), and to argue that "[t]he Virgin Mary is the instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic Church about the structure of society" (Warner, *Alone* 338). In her closing statements, Warner again takes Roland Barthes for a guide when he suggests that myths do not endure forever: "Some

objects become the prey of mythical speech for a while, then they disappear, others take their place and attain the status of myth. . . . one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language" (Warner, *Alone* 339). Warner posits that the Virgin Mary will endure, but she will recede into legend, because the reality her myth describes is over; the moral code she affirms has been exhausted, and, over time, the Virgin's legend "will be emptied of moral significance, and thus lose its present real powers to heal and to harm" (Warner, *Alone* 339).

Warner's book, predictably, angered some reviewers. A New York Times Book Review critic accused her of an unreasonable desire to assume conspiracy on the part of the Church, and of attempting to smash the ideal of the Virgin while displaying a reverence for all the artefacts that portray her. However, a critic in *The Nation* praised Warner's accumulation of fascinating and diverse material which prevented the book from being dry or tedious, which seems a more accurate assessment of the text. Whether Warner's assumptions and conclusions are useful or not, only history will show; myths have a life of their own and as generations follow each other they are put to uses that no-one can predict. In any case, her book provoked much debate, and, as a standard reference for studies of the cult of the Virgin, it has significantly influenced the development of feminist Christian theologies. Moreover, it has been a role model for further investigations of other religious female figures, such as Mary Magdalene.

The book is also an intensely dramatic example of the ways in which aspects of a personal myth system are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Warner has

given us clear insights into the ways her Catholic upbringing influenced her ways of looking at the world as a child, provoked her resistance as a teenager, and informed her thinking as an adult. Her descriptions of how she initially saw the symbol of the Virgin Mary as a guide to living, then as a restrictive and coercive influence, and later as a figure used by society in ways that affected the lives of all women underlines the fact that our personal myth systems are not static entities. They continue to change throughout our lives. Her determination to unearth and expose the ways in which the cult of the Virgin Mary was constructed, supported, and perpetuated over time shows how myths do not just appear from nowhere, but are continually reconstituted. Warner's elaboration of her own religious journey illuminates first of all the strength of the influence of our personal myth systems on our thoughts and behaviours. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, her work allows us to see that a personal myth system can change over time, and change as a result of input from our own feelings and thoughts. For any person brought up in the Catholic faith to translate personal doubts into such an in-depth investigation into one of that faith's most powerful symbols would be an unusual and even courageous move. However, considering that women are placed by Catholicism in a permanently subservient position, for a woman to perform such an undertaking in the 1970s was a considerable feat. Mary Daly, in the United States, had already published several groundbreaking critiques of the Catholic Church: *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) and *Beyond God the Father* (1973). In England, Monica Furlong had begun critiquing the Church of England in the 1960's (and still does at present). However, there were few lay women's voices raised in protest at the time. Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman* was not to

appear until the same year that Warner published *Alone of All Her Sex*. Other critiques of institutionalised religion from writers such as Carol Christ and Elaine Pagels, along with a body of research into goddess worship done by women such as Marija Gimbutas and Pamela Berger, did not appear until considerably later. Thus, Warner's study of the cult of the Virgin was one of the earliest second-wave feminist texts stringently critiquing the Catholic Church from outside the ranks of feminist theologians, many of whom were (and still are) attempting to reform the Church from within. Warner used the insights from her research on the cult of the Virgin, along with her research on Chinese philosophies for her study of the Empress Tz'u-hsi, to further her feminist agenda in her next book, her novel *In a Dark Wood*, which was published the following year. Warner then undertook a non-fiction study of another female icon, Victoria Regina.

Queen Victoria's Sketchbook

Warner's study of Queen Victoria follows a format which focuses on the Queen's, and Warner's own, intense interest in art. *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook* is the very first edition of Queen Victoria's sketchbooks and her private journal. Her many sketchbooks date from 1827, when Victoria was eight, until 1890, eleven years before she died at the age of 82. There are over fifty of these albums and sketchbooks, and Warner uses their images, amplified with information from the enthusiastic journal Victoria kept from 1832 (when she was 13) to her death, and her extensive correspondence. Warner uses the Queen's private documents to deconstruct the rather severe image customarily associated with Victoria: the austere, formal, stern-featured widow eternally dressed in black intoning firmly "We are not amused." A very different individual emerges from Warner's text,

which shatters the familiar icon quite thoroughly, and illuminates the Victoria behind her public facade, "who has been, until now, an unknown example of a marvellous and extinct breed: the amateur Victorian watercolourist" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 8). By focusing on the actual life of the Queen, and her own expressions of her thoughts and feelings, Warner sheds light on yet another myth, and shows how that myth was constructed over time from a few particular aspects of a singularly complex life.

In this study, Warner may appear to discard the notion of "the distance that is necessary for good historical judgement" that her character Jerome upholds in her earlier novel (Warner, *Dark Wood* 239), but she does not discard a historical perspective altogether. Rather, Warner is following to its logical conclusion the feminist insight that "the personal is political," and weaving an intensely personal side of Victoria into the historical record. Warner comments that Victoria was too practical to be confessional, and too focused on attempting to improve herself to be exhibitionistic:

> Yet she also had a prodigal capacity for self-revelation. Her drawings and her paintings are guileless, as she was. Their strength is her strength: impetuosity, quick decisiveness, spontaneity, loyalty to her own perception, obstinacy in her likes and dislikes, readiness to admire, to enjoy and to praise (Warner, *Sketchbook* 9).

These qualities in Victoria's art provide Warner with the opportunity to use Victoria's own personal experiences to reform the already existing mythic perceptions of the Queen by including the realities of the latter's life.

Warner not only presents Victoria's drawings and paintings, but demonstrates why

they have historical importance. For Warner, "[Victoria's] art forms a distinct yet audible accompaniment to the policies that were carried out under her rule" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 8). Warner also notes that the way society developed during her reign directly affects us in the present time. According to Warner, some of Victoria's sketches make visible the inability of her era to comprehend the realities of poverty, and her portraits of her children highlight the ascendancy of the family in her times as a cultural institution to be valued and protected. Warner also notes that her love and fascination for Germany, motherland of both her mother and her husband, were reflected in Victoria's watercolours. Warner explains that Victoria's later influence on England's foreign policy demonstrated her loyalty to her husband's concept of Germany. Victoria's watercolours show how much she was attracted to the peoples of foreign countries whom she perceived as exotic, for example those from India. This attraction, according to Warner, influenced the energetic expansion of the British empire to India, Africa, and all points of the world that took place under her rule.

Unlike Tz'u Hsi, Victoria presided over the beginnings of a dynasty, rather than the end. She had nine children, and before the First World War her grandchildren were rulers in Russia, Norway, Spain, Germany, Greece, Roumania, and Great Britain. Her descendants also ruled in Belgium and Portugal. It was not evident when she was young that Victoria would later be known as the Grandmother of Europe. She was an only child, and led a very sheltered existence under the supervision of her governess. Her chief tutor was a clergyman, who was responsible for her entire education as well as her religious instruction. After her father died in her first year of life, Victoria slept in her mother's

room until her accession to the throne. She had her first art lesson and began her first sketchbook at the age of eight, and these twice-weekly lessons were accompanied by other instruction in dancing, music, singing, piano, French, German, Italian, religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, and history (in which she was widely read). Many of her first sketches depicted her governess, while others showed relatives who came to visit. Victoria was desperately lonely during her childhood, and later wrote to her eldest daughter:

> I had led a very unhappy life as a child; had no scope for my very violent feelings of affection–had no brothers and sisters to live with–never had a father–from my unfortunate circumstances was not on a comfortable or at all intimate or confidential footing with my mother (so different from you to me)–much as I love her now–and did not know what a happy domestic life was (Warner, *Sketchbook* 24).

In her loneliness, Victoria developed a passion for the theatre like that of Tz'u-hsi, and it shaped her from her earliest childhood. For entertainment, she attended performances of romantic ballet, Italian opera, and theatrical melodramas, all of which were very popular in the late 1820s and 1830s in London. Her diary often records "I was very much amused," "I was *very very much amused*," "I was VERY VERY MUCH AMUSED" (with two underlinings), or even "I WAS VERY VERY MUCH AMUSED INDEED" (with three underlinings), to indicate her degree of pleasure–quite the opposite of her fabled comment, "We are not amused" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 47). The ballet was her first love, and by the age of fourteen, Victoria had a large doll collection consisting of dancers in various roles, including her favourite, Marie Taglioni, the pioneer of dancing en pointe and they

appeared in her sketchbooks as well. Her passion for the ballet, always greater than her intense interest in the theatre, was later overtaken by an affection for opera that was also reflected in her watercolours. She particularly admired the singer Giulia Grisi, the first soprano featured as a dominant solo performer. Warner notes that Victoria delighted in scenarios featuring dramatic contests for mastery between a strong man and a strong woman, ending with the man prevailing. This tendency helped to define Victoria's future relationships with her educators, her advisors, and particularly her husband. He became her protector, colleague, minister, mentor, doctor, and lover, to the point that diarist Charles Greville commented: "He is really discharging the functions of the Sovereign. He is King to all intents and purposes" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 101).

Warner's feminism comes into play here, in her focus on the views Victoria held about a woman's place vis-à-vis her husband, and the respective relations of fathers and mothers to their children. She always felt that her position as Queen was anomalous: "It is a reversal of the right order of things which distressed me much and which no one, but such a perfection, such an angel as [Albert] is–could bear and carry through" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 137). Contradictorily, however, she herself had trouble with submission, no matter how heartily she endorsed the notion. Victoria was enraged by the early women's suffrage meetings, wanted "this mad wicked folly of 'Women's Rights'" immediately stopped, and even commented that "one of the leaders should be whipped" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 103). Nevertheless, she states in a letter to her daughter:

> There is great happiness and great blessedness in devoting oneself to another who is worthy of one's affection; still men are very selfish and the

> woman's devotion is always one of submission, which makes our poor sex so very unenviable (Warner, *Sketchbook* 103).

Part of Victoria's misgivings stemmed from her views on maternity. Despite Victoria's own robust health and her ability to bear healthy children, she considered childbearing "the shadow side" of a woman's life (Warner, *Sketchbook* 105). She loved her children and was assiduous in raising her family, but she later confided in her daughter that childbearing was a yoke which severely limited a married woman's liberty: "I own it tried me sorely; one feels so pinned down–one's wings clipped–only half oneself" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 105). Her husband Albert was philosophically and morally the foundation stone of the family. He spent much time with his children, oversaw the staff, and oversaw the building of a family retreat for them at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, specifically designed to promote domestic happiness. Overall, Warner presents Victoria as a committed, conscientious, and loving mother, typical of parents at the end of the eighteenth century, when children symbolised goodness and purity. However, she notes that Albert laid more philosophical and moral stress on parenting than Victoria, who found it difficult to focus on her family with the same intensity during Albert's absences, and after his death.

Another offshoot of her passion for the arts was Victoria's preoccupation with the exoticism of other cultures. Warner argues that in later life, although she remained in deep mourning long after Albert died and led a very austere life, Victoria still retained the romanticism of her youth which had been fostered by her intense interest in dance, theatre, opera, and painting. Warner explains that although Victoria never saw any of the dominions she ruled over apart from the British Isles, she eagerly read much travel

literature, enjoyed numerous visits to Europe, and had particularly strong affinities with Scotland and India. In Scotland, Albert created another family retreat when he and Victoria bought the Balmoral estate near Aberdeen and he was again the guiding force behind the construction of another family home. Victoria was very enthusiastic about the Scottish mystique currently popularised in England by the novels of Sir Walter Scott (the first novel she read was Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*). She and Albert celebrated all kinds of Scottish rites, and pursued the simple pleasures of a life as unattended by servants and ceremony as possible. After he died, Victoria clung to their life there, supported by the counsel and strength of the devoted John Brown, later appointed "The Queen's Highland Servant." She reluctantly returned to her duties in London, but took Brown with her despite the objections of many to his informal manners, heavy drinking, prejudices, and his prerogatives. A constant reminder of her beloved Scotland, Brown remained her loyal servant until his death, when Victoria commemorated him with a copperplate engraving placed in her mausoleum.

Warner notes that Victoria's fascination with India influenced her choice of servants, and led to her insistence, despite the objections of the House of Commons and her Cabinet, on being created Empress of India. Curiously, Victoria and Albert were more tolerant of the beliefs of others than was common at the time. After the civil war and mutiny in 1857, when the Crown took over the government of India from the East India company, Victoria's proclamation declared that she would attempt no interference with native religions. Victoria employed Indians as servants in her households against the complaints of those at Court already upset by the influx of Scottish servants. Victoria

empathised with a young Sikh who had no sympathy for British victims of the mutiny and defended his attitude, noting that he must hate to hear of the people of his country being denigrated and executed. Convinced of his gentleness, she allowed him to play with her children and painted his portrait in watercolours. This is not to say that Victoria did not enjoy the lavish gifts and homage of the Indian delegations, or their exotic appearance, decked with jewels and beautiful clothing. But she also learned some Hindustani in order to speak to her Indian servants, because their language and culture interested her. One of these servants rose to a position of trust in which he was consulted about dispatches concerning Indian affairs, invited to family theatricals, and given cottages at Balmoral, Windsor, and Osborne, in the face of the outrage and prejudice against him which overshadowed even that directed against the Scottish John Brown. One of her last sketches, contained in her last sketchbook dated 1885-88, is of her Indian cavalry with turbans and banners. Victoria did one last sketch, of her six-year-old granddaughter Beatrice, in June 1890. After that her worsening eyesight made sketching impossible.

By the time of her Diamond Jubilee in 1897, Victoria had become an archetypal mother figure and a living icon, almost worshipped by some of her subjects. To Warner, Victoria was justified in leaving her sketchbooks and albums of paintings and photographs to posterity as heirlooms of the Crown. In them she preserved images of her life and character that demonstrate "her curiosity and her affections, her immediacy and gusto, her extraordinary simplicity in the midst of grandeur, her private values, so well defended in the course of the greatest public office and the closest public scrutiny" (Warner, *Sketchbook* 213-4). Warner's study of the private side of Victoria indicates how strongly a

personal myth system depends on the factors noted by Guattari in his discussion of modalities of subjective production (see Chapter One). Victoria's personal myth system was in part constructed by instructors and educational material extremely carefully selected by her mother and court advisors to direct her in certain ways of thinking. However, her isolated circumstances led her to develop a passion for the arts which added to her personal myth system in ways that they cannot have foreseen. As Guattari points out, the creation of identity is partly through rituals that include myth and art, and Warner's edition of Victoria's sketchbooks is ample evidence to support his claim. Warner describes a similar situation in her own childhood, when she describes herself as a bookworm "because I liked entering other worlds through stories. Above all, I liked stories which imagined secret or hidden or hitherto unapprehended worlds" (Warner, "Why I Write" 505). Warner sees herself as refusing the limits of her state–that of "a clumsy, plump girl child lacking in courage," who "especially wanted to be a tomboy" (Warner, "Why I Write" 505). Victoria had a different agenda: escaping a crushing sense of loneliness and lack of affection. Personal myth systems, then, are largely a product of our dreams and desires, rather than consciously thought out blueprints for living. Warner notes that Victoria's artistic record offers the relation of intimacy rather than that of hierarchy, so that it does succeed in giving a glimpse of her dreams and desires. Given her severe public persona, it is hard to imagine an intimate Queen Victoria, but Warner's edition of her art and private writings illuminates her personal myth system to afford the mythic Queen Victoria of many decades, the stern widow in perpetual mourning, a much more nuanced image. Thus, glimpses of Victoria's personal myth system afforded through

her watercolours and writing bring about changes in the public myth of Victoria herself, and offer insights into some of the perspectives behind her political decisions and actions. Warner performs the same function for the myth of the heroine of her next historical study.

Joan of Arc

Warner's fourth study of a larger-than-life female figure, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*, opens with an epigraph from Nietzsche:

> That which we now call the world is the result of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen in the course of the total evoluton of organic nature, have become entwined with one another and are inherited by us as the accumulated treasure of the entire past–as a treasure: for the value of our humanity depends on it: Rigorous science is in fact able to detach us from this ideational world only to a slight extent . . . but it can gradually and step by step illuminate the history of how this world as idea arose. . . .

Thus, Warner flags her intention to illuminate the myth of Joan of Arc much as she has worked toward illuminating the mythic Dragon Empress, the Virgin Mary, and Queen Victoria. In Joan's case, it is a far more complex task than in the case of Victoria. Of course there were controversies and political manipulations around the mythic figure of the Queen, both during and after her lifetime. However, they pale in the face of the political upheavals caused by Joan, which were augmented by the intensity of the religious struggles which raged over her alleged visions during her life and long afterward, and her

extremely dramatic trial and execution. The continuing power of the mythic story of Joan of Arc is attested to by innumerable literary representations of her life: novels, poetry, plays, paintings, and sculptures. Recently (1996) Warner wrote an introduction to *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, extracts from a translation of Joan's trial which appeared in a series titled *Visionary Women*.[7]

Warner believes that the story of Joan of Arc is "a story so famous that it transcends the media or the forms that have transmitted it: she is a heroine of history" (Warner, *Joan* 3). Warner also notes that Joan, "in her solid and material existence," has what Carlyle considered the primary mark of a hero: "sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity" (Warner, *Joan* 3). Joan's story is usually considered compelling and extraordinary because of her particular personality, explains Warner. She considers that the context in which the events of Joan's life took place deserves as much attention as the characteristics of Joan and the personalities around her, in affording an understanding of the phenomenon of her mythic persona. As usual, Warner will ask previously unasked questions in this text, and will look for what she calls the slanted truth, in the spaces where the story and history converge and both are created and recreated.

Joan is fascinating to Warner because of her almost unique status: "she is a universal figure who is female, but is neither a queen, nor a courtesan, nor a beauty, nor a mother, nor an artist of one kind or another, nor–until the extremely recent date of 1920

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[7] *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (Evesham, UK, Arthur James, 1996) was part of the *Visionary Women* series, intended, according to editor Monica Furlong, to salvage texts in which Christian women describe their experiences involving religious meaning and the life of the spirit and attempt to break the enforced silence in which women's perspectives have remained unheard.

when she was canonised–a saint" (Warner, *Joan* 6). She belongs to none of the categories in which women normally achieve stature, yet did so. To Warner, the way that Joan's story has come to be told and has become a timeless myth tells yet another story, "one about our concept of the heroic, the good and the pure" (Warner, *Joan* 7). According to Warner, this is the story of the concepts of heroism, goodness, and purity held by those who have described and reinvented Joan, generation after generation. To examine this legendary figure, Warner sets out to return Joan to the historical context of her life, "to make her real again," (Warner, *Joan* 7) while simultaneously exploring the legends that grew up over time around her, following Nietzsche's road map in order to unpack the mythic Joan. Historian Warner has detailed accounts of Joan's life to assist her, and uses them to full effect. Her methodology counters that of earlier chroniclers, who turned to narrative conventions rather than these factual sources to tell Joan's story. Warner's main source of information about Joan's life is the record of Joan's trial, where the details of her life are discussed exhaustively. A second major source is the documents of Joan's rehabilitation hearings, which contain depositions of witnesses made twenty-five years after the fact.

In her prologue, Warner is careful to explain that although demythologising Joan may appear to be an attempt to belittle her legend, that is not the intention. Warner wants to show the rich diversity of the historical context of Joan, and of Joan's character itself. She seeks to augment the mythic aspects of Joan's legend, which is simplified according to the formulae applicable to fables, with the complications of reality. Warner believes that by looking at Joan this way, we can learn more from her as a model than we would from Joan

as only a larger-than-life myth. Thus, rather than diminish the legend, Warner's purpose is to demonstrate that heroism is no less heroic, but perhaps even more so, when moved back into the plane of daily life. Her study is also a plea to recognise, research and name the multifarious duties that women have historically undertaken. Warner argues that Joan is usually presented as Amazon, knight, or personification of virtue "because the history of individual women and of women's roles has been so thin. In the writing of female biography, it is easy to revert unconsciously to known stereotypes" (Warner, *Joan* 9). To Warner, Joan is anomalous because her renown, unlike that of many female figures, arose from the sphere of action rather than contemplation, and what she accomplished devolved from her own initiative, not from her birthright. Warner argues for a more complex vocabulary to describe women's activities than "our restrictions of wife, mother, mistress, muse" (Warner, *Joan* 9), and urges her readers to consider what women might learn from the historic context of the life and afterlife of an extraordinary woman might mean for our present classification system. Thus, Warner is examining the myth system of the society in which the phenomenon of Joan emerged. The previously unasked questions which fascinate Warner are "why Joan of Arc was believed, how that belief was expressed, what its expression affirmed and what causes were served" (Warner, *Joan* 10). To answer these questions, Warner divides the book into two sections: the historical Joan and representations of her after her death.

At the outset of the book, Warner notes that there is no surviving record of Joan's appearance: "She passed from the condition of the knowable to the condition of the all-imaginable" (Warner, *Joan* 13). This factor has allowed later imaginary versions of her

which reflected the fears, admiration, hatred, or love which resulted from her extraordinary actions and status. According to Warner, some of the anomalies of her position were created by others, and some by Joan herself. Throughout the text, Warner devotes much attention to the fact that Joan was placed, and placed herself, on various borders, which consisted of transitional states and locations between what was permissible and what was not. The first of these was the border between girlhood and womanhood. Joan was reputedly a virgin, and from all contemporary accounts she did not menstruate. She called herself Jehanne la Pucelle, and Warner explains that the word pucelle is a particular word for virgin that combines youth, innocence, but also readiness for womanhood, a girl on the threshold of sexuality and motherhood. It denotes a sense of promise and implies a state of transition. This border was one constructed by Joan's chronological age, and contemporary cultural notions around girlhood and womanhood. Warner argues that because the word itself implied no rank, and was used at all levels of society, it did not tie Joan to her lowly social origins. Thus, it helped her to move into higher levels of society without being seen as a deliberate attempt to transcend her lower class status. It also expressed the border into sexuality and womanhood that she would never cross. This ambiguity allowed Joan as a symbol to "span opposites, to contain irreconcilable oppositions" (Warner, *Joan* 23).

Two other border-crossings were deliberately constructed by Joan herself, and contained elements of spiritual transgression. They became the chief substance of her trial, for they were the issues upon which her defiance of the Church was based: "first, the truth of her voices; second, her male dress" (Warner, *Joan* 140). The primary issue of the trial

was the nature of Joan's voices. Her inquisitors believed that the supernatural could manifest itself on earth, and feared physical appearances of the devil. Joan stated over and over that the saints who presented themselves to her, and their voices, were apprehended by her material senses. Warner points out that she was, in the end, condemned for experiencing the supernatural in as concrete a way as she experienced reality. Joan's saints had bodies, spoke French, wore clothes, and could be touched. Such representations of saints, materialising in a mundane fashion in a recognisable human setting, flew in the face of Christian notions of the holy, with the abstract remaining abstract, and all things behaving according to their appropriate nature. To Joan's judges, fleshly experience was sinful, and the concreteness of Joan's perceptions of the saints was heretical. Warner considers that Joan "displayed a profound and unerring ability to cross from the permitted to the impermissible and thus to define others' fears and assumptions, until the clarity became unbearable and she became a victim of her own illumination" (Warner, *Joan* 136). One could say the same of Jesus Christ, and perhaps most other martyrs, but such detailed historical records are usually not always available to examine most figures who have reached mythic status. Warner notes that Joan is "the only saint of the church who was burned by the same church as a heretic, an idolater, and an apostate" (Warner, "Introduction" *Trial* 11).

Another border-crossing, very distressing to her judges, was Joan's insisting that she was a maid, indeed a virgin, while her actions and her clothing proclaimed her to be male. By her dress, she inverted the God-given order. Moreover, the clothing Joan wore signified yet another border-crossing, that of social status; she dressed herself as a knight.

Demonstrating that one could be a nobleman even if one was not, Joan's armour and accoutrements effectively cast aside her peasant's origins and femaleness for the most noble status of the chivalrous age in which she lived. Even her first retinue consisted of a horse, a knight, a squire, and four servants. Warner explains that her accusers attacked the unwomanliness and immodesty of her dress, the luxury of her equipage, and the carrying of arms. They understood her dress as a potent sign of her unique status, and condemned her for it, and Joan herself was aware of its importance. After her recantation, when she realised that she had forsworn both her voices and her dress, she reversed herself regarding both: "The visions and the dress were one and indivisible" (Warner, *Joan* 140). Her dress was the physical manifestation of her uniqueness, which she and her assessors both knew.

Joan's visions and her transvestism were the serious issues of her trial, and her life would have been spared if she had recanted, denied her visions and wore women's clothing. Her accusers were not united in their views and aims. Some found her an unbelievable hoax, and wished to prove this, while others believed her, considered her dangerous, and wanted her dead. It is not clear under what circumstances Joan did abjure, for accounts were confused and full of contradictions. Moreover, since she could not read the document she signed, it is also unclear whether or not she was tricked. Those who wanted her dead were furious at Joan's recantation, while others rejoiced that she would live. Within four days, she reversed herself, resumed wearing male dress, and affirmed that she had heard her voices again. In her 1996 introduction to *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, Warner condenses the arguments she makes in her 1981 study to explain that when two

systems of power are seen to clash in one society, fears of heresy arise. Joan, according to Warner, is an example of "inarticulate power investing itself with all the accoutrements and style of articulate power" (Warner, "Introduction" *Trial* 25). Although she did not appear to use sorcery to do so, Joan achieved an influential position, voiced unusual ideas, and attracted a significant following. Her public presentation of herself was entirely conventional for the times, had she been a man of the church or a man of the world and not a female. "She transgressed against class, sex, social boundaries and feudal expectations," states Warner: "it is the hardest thing for a social anomaly to become a regular and accepted member of the dominant group, of the centre of power" (Warner, "Introduction" *Trial* 26). Her transgression lent her charisma, but made her extremely dangerous, even though Joan used male dress to appear sexless, rather than male, and was not in disguise. Her enemies perceived her as a woman–a person who according to societal order should properly remain silent–actually wielding articulate power.

The articulateness of Joan's defence of herself is an aspect of her that intrigues Warner. Her study of Joan reflects similar desires to those put forward by the editor of the *Visionary Women* series. Monica Furlong considers that women have long made significant and valuable statements about religious meaning and the life of the spirit. With life experiences very different from those of men, their perceptions of events differ as well, and it is important that present-day women read texts like the translation of Joan's trial documents. Furlong notes that legends of historically notable women have often been presented over time in various distorted ways, and need reassessing. She believes that their actual words and thoughts can offer understandings of ideas and views of religion differing

greatly from our own, and provide inspiration for our own thinking about religious meaning. Warner perceives Joan as such a figure, "one of the few female saints who led a life of action," even as she deplores the 1990s use of her cult for right-wing causes in France (Warner, *Joan* 33-4).

As in her previous studies, Warner does not seek to glorify, or to achieve a seamless coherent representation of Joan. Rather, she introduces complexities and nuances to our notions of Joan, which make her all the more admirable in the eyes of the reader. Moreover, Warner's complex portrait of Joan also offers glimpses into the latter's personal myth system and the myth systems currently circulating in the society around her. Warner's book illuminates the complicated way that a personal myth system is created from intertwining strands of belief and imagination, the exigencies of real life, and societal expectations. According to Warner, Joan had a difficult relationship with her parents, and ran away from home at the age of sixteen or seventeen, rather than marry the man they had chosen for her. Although Joan chose to dress as a knight and used male trappings to accomplish her goal, at the same time she prided herself on her skills in sewing and spinning, considered to have higher social status than the male occupation of herding cows. When she found that she had been sold to her enemies, the English, Joan leapt from the tower of Beaurevoir castle where she was imprisoned, in an apparent effort to kill herself. All of these facts, along with a myriad of other information, show that Joan was far from a single-minded individual, a hero whose purpose was never deflected, who never experienced chaos in her life or in her own psyche. It is a complicated portrait of Joan that Warner reveals, which resonates with women's own personal myth systems more urgently

than a Joan constantly and consistently free of doubts and contradictions. Joan's convictions and sincerity seem even more remarkable when they are shown to waver, for then the magnitude of her struggle becomes apparent. Warner refuses the codification of Joan's uniqueness, and urges that Joan's unique experience is universal because any individual's experience is unique: "The conflicts in Joan's story are disregarded; they spoil the simplicity of her heroism," states Warner. However, she does accept that Joan fits into several stereotypes that have circulated over centuries, and that it is very difficult to break the mould of received ideas. She links our Western society's yearning for an integrity that is not subject to decay to our refusal to accept the impossibility of enclosing the idea of virtue with boundaries that will never change.

According to Warner, anthropologist Carl von Sydow applied the botanical term ecotype (describing a plant that migrates, adapting and developing differently according to its surroundings) to "migrant cultural figures, who take root and flourish in different places in different guises" (Warner, *Joan* 218). Warner sees the figure of the Amazon as such ecotype, and another is the allegorical figure Virtue, personifying an abstract moral quality. Both of these ecotypes assisted to make Joan an unforgettable figurehead in struggles for women's rights in the fifteenth century, in the late eighteenth century, and in the present day. That she was an inspiration to women even in her own time is evidenced by her contemporary Christine de Pizan's heartfelt praise of Joan. Christine had previously displayed her admiration for women by vigorously refuting Jean de Meung's antifeminism

in his and Guillaume de Lorris's *Romance of the Rose*[8] by writing her poem *L'Epistre au dieu d'amours*, which she finished in 1399.[9] In her last surviving work, which she wrote during her enforced exile from Paris, she names Joan as the living embodiment of a virtuous woman. *Le dittié sur Jeanne d'Arc*[10] is the first poem composed on Joan, and the only major one written while she was still living. Completed on 31 July, 1429, it commemorates Joan's victory at Orléans that year, and the subsequent coronation of Charles VII. Christine writes:

> Oh! What honour for the female sex! It is perfectly obvious that God has special regard for it when all these wretched people who destroyed the whole kingdom–now recovered and made safe by a woman, something that 5,000 men could not have done–and the traitors have been exterminated. (Warner, *Joan* 220).

The feminist perspective in Warner's book exasperated some reviewers. *Catholic Historical Review* critic Charles William Jones categorises feminism among "fads of thought" such as Freudianism, Allegory, Existentialism, and Protest (Jones 316). He derides Warner for riding the crest of feminism with her studies of the Virgin Mary and

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[8] This poetic work, begun by Guillaume de Lorris around 1237, was left incomplete. Some lines were added to conclude his segment by an unknown author. A large amplification, very different in tone, was finished by Jean de Meun around 1257. This section was considered by many to be denigrating to women. Jean de Gerson, of the University of Paris, critiqued de Meun's approach in a 1402 tract, and Jean Molinet wrote a 1483 prose revision.

[9] The poem was known in the sixteenth century as *Le contre-romant de la rose, nommé Gratia Dei* (Yenal 31).

[10] Variant titles were *Ditié de Jehanne D'Arc*, and *Poeme de la pucelle* (Yenal 40).

Joan of Arc. Praising the "meticulousness" of her "documentary acumen," in contrast with "an unacademic carelessness in *Alone of All Her Sex*," he seems to ignore the lack of historical documents regarding Mary of Nazareth, even though he does note that Mary is virtually pure myth and cult. He considers that Warner tries to separate Joan from earth, although Warner's purpose is quite the opposite. She states at one point: "In the fullest sense, Joan was buried in the body," and continues, "she was condemned for experiencing the other world as simply and as concretely as she experienced this world every day" (Warner, *Joan* 130). Faulting Warner for her methodology, and taking offence at her feminist perspective, Jones simply fails to engage with the actual issues in the text. Feminist critic Julia Epstein, in *The Nation*, is very positive about Warner's archeological survey: "the story of how the story came to be told" (Epstein 670).[11] She comments that Joan's status has always been particularly fluid because of the Church's fickleness and lack of commitment regarding her rehabilitation; Joan was burned at the stake on 30 May 1431, but not an official saint until 1920. Epstein finds Warner's representation of Joan "a persuasive iconological interpretation of Joan's meaning in history and of her spiritual and representational authority" (Epstein 671). There is an obvious gap between the perceptions of a man writing for a Catholic journal and a woman writing for a secular one. Clearly, Jones is on a pro-Catholic and anti-feminist bent, while Epstein addresses what Warner is trying to do, rather than attack her politics. The two reviews are clear indications that Warner's political stance is a strong one, and has a significant impact on her readers. They are also indicators that Warner's purposeful challenges to accepted

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[11] Julia Epstein, "A Heroine for All Seasons" (*The Nation*, 30 May, 1981: 670-2).

views of the past do bring about an altered consciousness in her readers, whether they like it or not!

The passion for historical research displayed in Warner's first four non-fiction texts extends to subsequent studies, but in a different manner. I will not be discussing her last three non-fiction texts because they do not afford the same opportunities to discuss the concept of the personal myth system as her four studies of specific women. All three texts offer an abundance of material for consideration, and their contents do illuminate the arena of myth. However, their sweeping inclusiveness is focused on cultural issues affecting women (and men as well) in general, rather than the lives of particular women, which precludes the question of how myth affects a specific life. These broad studies explore a wealth of material, and each one is a forum where Warner poses many more of her always provocative questions. In *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (1985), Warner examines "the female form as an expression of desiderata and virtues" (Warner, *Monuments* xix). She argues that the many images of women in public places, regardless of their classical and Christian origins, affect our lives in the present day. They allegorically "inform and animate many of the myths which have, in constant interplay, enriched and reinforced, maintained and reshaped our present identities as the inheritors of classical and Christian culture" (Warner, *Monuments* xxiii). To Warner, we seem to trust that these allegorical figures construct a societal order, and offer a promise of the future. Warner's subsequent extensive study, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1994), focuses on the tellers of fairy tales. Warner traces the history of the fairy tale from classic origins to the present, highlighting the "prolonged struggle between

different social groups to control the teller" (Warner, *Beast* 416). Her aim is to indicate that fairy tales can be interpreted and reinterpreted, allowing room for liberatory themes and models. She argues that "storytelling makes women thrive," and other people as well. Therefore, it is important to explore the context in which tales are told: who is telling them, to whom, and why. Warner received many queries after the publication of this study, wondering why she had focused on women, and asking "What about the men?". This is a predictable and extremely common response to almost any feminist work, and Warner's subsequent study on fear, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (1998), is a digression from her previous, specifically feminist-oriented, studies. Concentrating on male characters in stories, and finding princes too insipid, she found herself focusing on ogres. Since frightening figures are not exclusively male, her study veered away from gender toward "a cultural exploration of fear, its vehicles, and its ambiguous charge of pleasure and pain" (Warner, *Bogeyman* x). The book is an in-depth study of figures which terrify, and in this text, Warner explores "three of the principal methods of coping with anxieties grounded in common experience, as well as the nameless terrors that come in the dark and assail the mind" (Warner, *Bogeyman* 4).

Each of these studies deserves discussion, but all are historical and factual discussions and none of them focuses on how myth affects people on an individual basis. Warner's novels, on the other hand, communicate particular crises in the lives of her characters and show their personal myth systems changing as a result of these crises. Italo Calvino, discussing right and wrong uses of politics in literature, states:

> When we become aware of our disease or of our hidden motives, we have

> already begun to get the better of them. What matters is the way in which we accept our motives and live through the ensuing crisis. This is the only chance we have of becoming different from the way we are–that is, the only way of starting to invent a new way of being (Calvino, *Uses* 100).[12]

In my next chapters, I will discuss how Warner explores these issues in a way that allows a reader to see the innermost areas of her character's pysches, including their personal myth systems.

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[12] A collection of Italo Calvino's lectures, essays, and radio broadcasts, translated by Patrick Creagh, was published as *The Uses of Literature* (San Diego, New York, and London, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986).

Mapping the Exotic: The Far East and the South Seas

> There are no safe territories. The work itself is and has to be a battleground.
>
> Italo Calvino

Marina Warner's novels are all battlegrounds, in the sense that Calvino expresses in this epigraph from an essay discussing the audience for whom a writer writes (Calvino, *Uses* 88).[1] Her fiction challenges "the way things are": the myths that we live by, and the connections of these myths with the material world of daily life. Warner's challenges are always large ones, questioning the ways in which we look at the world at an intense level; she examines the meaning of life through each fictional character. The interactions between various levels of myth play out in each novel, to demonstrate how the connections between the personal myth systems of the characters and the myths circulating in their families, in their social milieu, and in the historical past determine the directions of their lives. The characters are, in some cases desperately, seeking to find a way to make sense of their worlds. Thus they reveal their deepest beliefs, and it becomes evident that their personal myth systems are composed of a conglomeration of myths from various sources. Another aspect of myth becomes apparent in Warner's fiction. Myths travel through time, and from place to place; they migrate, and Warner maps their migrations. Her mappings of myth in each novel follow various pathways which eventually converge,

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[1] Calvino's essay "Whom Do We Write For; or, The Hypothetical Bookshelf" is in his collection *The Uses of Literature* (Patrick Creagh translator, San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982).

leading to the personal myth system of the main female protagonist. Each of her novels demonstrates how a particular woman makes sense of her world in light of knowledge gained from mythologies that come from as far away as ancient times and distant places, and as nearby as her own personal experience.

Mapping as a political strategy in writing is discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who state: "Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come" (Deleuze and Guattari 4-5).[2] They argue that plant life is entirely rhizomatic, and some animals, in their pack form, are as well. A rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a subterranean stem that can be connected at any point to anything else, and thus ceaselessly establishes connections. To them, multiplicities are rhizomatic; a rhizome may be broken at any spot, but will continue to grow through other parts of itself even if most of it has been destroyed. Rhizomes are not amenable to structural or generative models. They are maps, rather than tracings–that is, open and connectable in all their dimensions, having multiple entryways. In sum, Deleuze and Guattari state:

> In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of

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[2] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari oppose contemporary psychoanalysis in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). They argue that Western culture is sick, and urge that we think in alternative ways to avoid leading what they call a fascist life.

states (Deleuze and Guattari 21).

Their image of the rhizome works very well to portray the nature of myths and how they travel across the boundaries of time and space. Moreover, their notion of the rhizome is very like Roberto Calasso's notion of myth, allowing of no system, but expressing the connection of everything with everything else: the connection that gives meaning to life. Novelist A. S. Byatt draws attention to a similar conviction of Italo Calvino's: "The nature of myth is not to be resolved into one meaning or another. It is a fluid, endlessly interconnected web" (Byatt 143).[3]

Warner maps myths with a purpose in her novels: "the novel is above all a form in which crossing borders, entering new territories, trespassing and fence-mending can help make up new identities," and history "can teach us directly about the past and metaphorically about the future" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 31). She sees her method of working as similar to a treasure hunt, "pursuing a dual search, at several levels of inquiry, historical and imaginative" (Zabus, "Spinning" 528). Another purposeful aspect of her work, derived from Warner's Catholic upbringing, is the bipartite structure that her novels all share: "the past is recapitulated in the present, with variations that I hope are telling. . . the New Covenant (the present day) fulfills the enigmatic prophecies of the Old (the past) in a typological pattern that seems etched into my mind" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 33). Warner notes that two other of her writing practices result from her Catholic

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[3] A. S. Byatt discusses formulation of myth in "Arachne," a story in *Ovid Metamorphosed* (Philip Terry, editor, London: Chatto and Windus, 2000). Calvino made the comment in "Ovid and Universal Contiguity," his preface to a 1979 edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated by Patrick Creagh and included in *The Uses of Literature* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986).

education, although she applies them in a secular way: the Catholic daily examination of conscience, and meditation on holy pictures. Warner uses the first "to calibrate the characters' relations with one another, to weigh motive and justification, ends and means" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 32). The second has trained her to imagine scenes and their emotional content extremely vividly: "If the writing is going well, I can feel I'm racing to transcribe in words a picture scrolling in front of my eyes" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 32). Warner was relieved and delighted to hear of Italo Calvino's similar practice when he described his stories growing from images that had made an impact on him.[4] Previously, she had worried "that proper fiction should begin with Real Life" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 33). These comments indicate the significant impact that Warner's own personal myth system has on her fiction.

As integral aspects of Warner's mythological explorations, history and politics–the backbones of her non-fiction–provide a wealth of detail in her fiction. Her awareness that there is infinitely more than a cause-effect relationship between history and myth results in their being sufficiently interwoven in her texts that they seem at times indistinguishable from one another. Warner's political convictions regarding the nature of story-telling are evident in her handling of post-colonial and feminist issues. She is always careful in her allocation of narrative roles, giving a voice to those traditionally considered to occupy the

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[4] Warner refers here to Italo Calvino's lectures published as *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Patrick Creagh, translator, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988). Here, he describes how he used to peruse comic books in his pre-reading days, and how his stories grew out of images as he worked to create what he terms "a fantastic iconology" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 32). Warner calls his text a wonderful handbook for writers.

lower rungs in a social hierarchy. Her novels demonstrate how British mythologies were inextricably implicated in explorations and research studies which materially affected the lives of the native inhabitants living in countries which the British colonised. Because of her own politics, Warner allows the mythologies of these peoples to come forward to refute those of the British. To Warner the British, in general, are "worldly, pragmatic, and promote a cult of reason that is of course irrational in itself. But it has been used to legitimise so much of the march forward, the idea of progress of British letters, British power, systems, law etc." (Dabydeen 117-18). The words "cult" and "irrational" used in this context indicate that it is not at all unreasonable to characterise politics as myth. Warner also pursues her own feminist agenda in her novels, just as she does in her non-fiction. Her feminist agenda is always reflected in the way that her female characters are portrayed with respect, and develop toward wisdom and self-esteem as their lives unfold. These aspects of Warner's writing appear in each of her novels, beginning with the first.

Warner's four novels divide themselves easily into two groups. Her first two fictional publications focus on a female character, and problems she faces relating to men and the world at large, while her third and fourth novels are fiction based on material from Warner's own family histories. In this chapter, I will discuss Warner's first two novels. Here, Warner maps cultural myths around British trade in China in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a seventeenth-century Roman Catholic mission in China, a twentieth-century Roman Catholic investigation into alleged miracles in Italy, a British anthropological study done on a South Sea Island, and present-day British university politics. Concurrently, she maps the personal myth systems of her fictional characters,

showing how these interact and affect each other. All of these mythologies weave themselves through the characters' psyches, shape-shifting as they go.

In a Dark Wood

Warner's first novel was published in 1977, following the publication of her first two historical studies, *The Dragon Empress* (1972), and *Alone of All Her Sex*, (1976). The focus on historical research required for these two non-fiction texts carries over in large measure to the novel, to the point that the historical aspects of the book at times threaten to overwhelm the story. Initial reviewers complained about the ostentatiousness of Warner's erudition and the schematic nature of the structure. Indeed, the wealth of historical detail at times seriously does interrupt the flow of the narrative. Nevertheless, the ways in which Warner links seventeenth-century struggles over religion at the Chinese court and those in present-day Britain brilliantly exemplifies how ancient myths migrate, and affect people's daily lives in the far distant future. Warner addresses these complexities directly when she encapsulates her mythmapping thus:

> Paula saw then, with a sudden clarity, the way her life was interspun with the lives of these others, how the single skein of her immediate family was looped in such a way that distant distorted faces staring out of newspapers, close problems of philosophy puzzled out long ago in a distant place, even the character of a Chinese emperor and his court, were gathered in so that these small and unreverberating dramas - Tilly's illness, David's packing - were performed against a background of greater breadth and business. The flash filled her with a sense of wonder, and of tenderness (Warner, *Dark*

Wood 111).

It is significant that Warner allots this insight, along with many other important insights in the book, to Paula. Although she first appears as a relatively insignificant character (a young woman of twenty-three), the several threads in the novel all converge on Paula in the end. How she develops her personal myth system, and how those of others fail them, is a significant theme. Initially, her father Jerome and her uncle Gabriel loom much larger than Paula. As the story unfolds, the braided lives of these three characters present a tripartite approach to faith–intellectual, secular, and communal–and demonstrate the advantages, challenges, and pitfalls of each. At first, Paula (and the reader), are treated to much directive philosophising on the part of her father and her uncle. Later, Paula grows more and more confident during ideological confrontations with her uncle, depends less and less on her overprotective father, and speaks more herself. In the end, Paula is the protagonist in the novel who survives and whose personal myth system most effectively makes sense of her world. Through her characterisation of Paula, Warner promotes an eclectic approach to myth systems, and demonstrates the importance of art and story-telling in the transmission of mythologies. Even more importantly, Warner gives Paula the role of questioning mythologies, and resisting them.

Paula's name reflects male hopes and dreams, for Jerome was convinced that she would be a boy. In his disappointment, he has taught Paula Amazonian ideals, telling her that her namesake, a Roman patrician, joined the aesthetic circle of his namesake, Saint Jerome, and founded one of the earliest convents. Paula resists her father's idea of female heroism, though she has absorbed from him the notion of being a strong-willed woman.

She is headstrong, unwilling to be controlled by circumstance, and her notion of being in control leads her to adopt an arms-length attitude to others. Her brother-in-law (and friend) David says, "Polo, you're lovely, but you live too much in your head. . . . Not that you're heartless. You just try to be, so as you won't get hurt. Bad scene, Polo, believe me" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 109). With her erstwhile lover, Paula longed to be touched and loved, yet simultaneously felt dry as dust and "bloodless, an animal hung up to bleed white so that it can be fittingly consumed" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 131). Here, she echoes the Margaret Atwood heroine who sees herself as an object to be consumed, becomes anorexic, and finally makes a cake figure of herself and eats it to escape her sense of entrapment.[5] Resolving to be self-sufficient, she terminates her two-year relationship, moves into her own flat, cuts her hair very short, and single-mindedly pursues her own life. Paula feels that an independent woman should initiate relationships with men, but she has no idea how; she feels hunted when she wants to be the hunter. Her half-hearted acquiescence has caused men's invitations to cease. Even platonic friendships elude Paula. When she reads a psychologists' study reporting that students have on average 6.25 friends each, her own lack of friends is "a wound in her entrails" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 133). Her relationships with family members have also proven difficult.

Paula's resistance to the philosophies of her father and her uncle springs in large measure from her developing feminism, at this point in her life a major component of her

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[5] Atwood's portrayal of anorexia in *The Edible Woman* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), is one of the earliest to appear in fiction written in English by women. Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), was an earlier portrayal of bulimia. Anorexia nervosa was officially labelled a female nervous disorder in 1873.

personal myth system. *In a Dark Wood* can be seen presently as a type of feminist bildungsroman, and recent critics have praised Warner's portrayal of early second-wave feminism; the feminist ideals Paula strives to attain are those of the 1970s, when women became aware of their subordinate status to men through conscious-raising groups, and sought to achieve self-determination. Warner shows Paula attempting to define feminism for herself in the midst of apparently almost overwhelmingly male-oriented family and work environments. She is a free-lance artist, presently illustrating a dictionary of Greek myths. Paula considers them extremely misogynist: "Yet another piece of sexist trash, she thought, with all the ingredients: woman as prize, as victim, as sex symbol, as cheated but loving wife, finally as death-dealer - and she wasn't even given the credit for murder, because the poor little fool did her husband to death unwittingly" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 100). Paula wants women to be friends with each other instead of rivals, and deplores the race to "get a man, which ends with a woman and children dependent on a man for their livelihood. She would rather children and parents were friends, and lovers were friends as well, but cannot find a way to make this approach work in practical terms. Here, Warner is true to her own belief that women cannot escape the patriarchal world to construct a utopia of their own choosing, but need to learn how to live in our male-oriented world in a feminist manner. Paula emerges, as if from under an umbrella of male beliefs, into a sense of her own spiritual truths. The dynamics of Paula's development indicate how women can find a way to develop their own personal myth systems among mythologies that have proliferated over time, taking little or no account of the realities of women's lives. A significant message of this novel is that there are few examples of how women might

construct a personal myth system; women have to imagine one themselves.

The same feminist perspective is evident in Warner's portrait of Paula's mother Teresa, an actress. Paula deplores her mother for being dependent on those who surround her, failing to control her own life, and making ill-considered, enthusiastic plunges into plays and love affairs that Paula considers demeaning. To Paula, her mother is a perfect example of women's conditioning; she accepts or declines, but never offers or expresses inclination herself. Her mother might appear dominant, the centre of a circle of admiring men, but to Paula "this was the quintessence of weakness, the feminine position of dependence" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 131). Paula has an unshakeable resolve to differ from her mother. Here, Warner portrays a mother-daughter relationship that Carolyn Heilbronn would consider typical in women's fiction.[6] Heilbrun argues that mothers are the single greatest problem in the stories–fiction or memoirs–by women: "For most daughters, mothers evoke what Aristotle recommended as the ideal response to tragedy: pity and terror. That is, pity for the mother's condition, and terror that one might resemble her" (Heilbrun 61). Paula pities both her parents: "Teresa and Jerome, she moaned. The blind, the deaf, the dumb" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 133). Nevertheless, one aspect of her mother that Paula does approve is her mother's refusal to interfere with the lives of her family members. She strongly defends her mother from her uncle's criticisms: "You see Ma treats the world with a kind of rough justice which in the end lets everyone get on with their own

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[6] Carolyn Heilbronn's comments appear in lectures urging that women abandon seeking the appropriate and instead embrace liminality, or a state of transition, which offers them freedom to be or become themselves. Her Alexander Lectures (University of Toronto 1997) were published as *Women's Lives: The View From the Threshold* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

lives," and pronounces her mother's attitude "better for me, for Franny, and for you too than if she clung devotedly to every one of us" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 36). Moreover, Paula is impressed at her mother's practicality which comes into play when her father's public disgrace threatens to destroy him.

Although Paula has always longed for male approval, particularly from her father, she finds his doting attentions stifling. She has always seen her father as all-powerful, but comes to realise his vulnerabilities. Jerome's insecurities may seem to result from his present problem, but they have always been an intrinsic aspect of his personal myth system since his childhood. Jerome was born in England, but was raised in China, where his father Henry built a trading empire. His family, unlike many foreign traders of that time who regarded the Chinese as backward, loved China and deeply respected its culture, institutions, and people. Jerome's memories of China feature blood sports and business. His father was not a religious man; he had a passion for hunting, trading, and collecting trophies, which now reside in Jerome's home in London. Because of his father's very successful business ventures, Jerome's life is well-endowed with creature comforts: a well-appointed house, a fine wine cellar, good food, and gentlemen's clubs. A major element of his personal myth system handed on to him by his father is an "aesthetic of luxury" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 57).

However, Henry was a harsh and demanding man, rewarding failure with violent anger and denigration, inculcating in his son the ineradicable familial myth that Jerome has never, and will never, measure up to expectations. Accordingly, Jerome is a man of violent emotions, prone to flashes of rage and maudlin recitals of poetry. Jerome says that he has

been someone's appendage all his life: Henry's son, Teresa's young man, Gabriel's brother, Paula's father, or David Clark's father-in-law.[7] He is consumed with envy over his brother's autobiographical project: "I should be the one engaged on an important work, instead of frittering away my time and my talent - such as it is - in criticism" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 4). It is only after Gabriel's untimely death that Jerome suddenly feels equal and adequate. He does at last have an important undertaking: one which takes him back to his commercial roots. Jerome will commodify Gabriel's work. He plans to finish his brother's book and dedicate it to Gabriel. In the process, Jerome will alter it significantly, for he considers that Gabriel's nostalgia for China prevented him from keeping "the distance that is necessary for good historical judgement" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 239). Here, Jerome introduces a critical line of thought that imagines the possibility of an objective point of view, which is antithetical to the views that Gabriel holds about historical research. Thus, in much the same way as his father exploited the Chinese to advance his trading career in the past, Jerome exploits his brother's passion for China to advance his own professional career.

As a young man, Jerome wrote one very well-regarded book of literary criticism, *The Drowning of Plebas*, but has never written another. His journalistic accomplishments do not fit into the dreams of glory that he derived from his education. When he attended Oxford, Jerome and his close friend, expatriate American James Cunliffe, determined to

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[7] Warner mentioned that this aspect of Jerome's character was based on that of her own father, who saw himself as a failed second son. His brother, over a decade younger, seemed more appreciated in the eyes of his mother, who spoiled him and later financially rescued him when business schemes failed (Interview with author, November 14, 2000).

become writers rather than lower themselves to enter a profession; their watchword was "Thine is the kingdom" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 88). It is the glory of immortality through writing that fired Jerome's soul, and became a significant and enduring cornerstone of his personal myth system, but poetry cannot help Jerome when scandal erupts at the *Review*, a journal he co-founded with his father's money. A rival journal, *The New Radical*, has discovered that Jerome has accepted funding from the American Central Intelligence Agency for the *Review*, and his reputation and editorial career are ruined. The article in the *New Radical* not only points out the CIA's involvement in the *Review*, but attacks Jerome himself. "Namier believes that snobbery of all kinds is one of humanity's driving forces," trumpets the article; Jerome himself belongs to "the ivory tower of privilege, jealously guarding his own interests, and therefore intimately trapped by the status quo which provides him and his enterprise with paymasters" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 83). His father's trading company in China also comes under attack. What Jerome saw as honest Victorian enterprise is termed acts of piracy. The fortunes his father acquired, which financed the early stages of the *Review*, are alleged to have been derived from the lucrative traffic in opium which flourished at the end of the Empire. Here, Warner inserts into her novel the historical details of British opportunism in China at the time of the Opium Wars of 1839-42 which she describes in *The Dragon Empress*: "There has rarely been such self-righteousness combined with self-interest as the British mercantile class displayed" (Warner, *Empress* 46). Thus, Warner contrasts nineteenth-century British thinking with contemporary post-colonial notions, demonstrating how the same set of historical circumstances looks entirely different seen through the mythological lens of another

century.

Further disaster dismays Jerome when he discovers that he has been betrayed by his lifelong friend James, co-founder of the *Review*. James has strong ties to the United States, his birth country, which Jerome always mistakenly assumes to have been superseded by ties to Britain. When Jerome confronts James with revelations of CIA funding, James states: "I own fifty percent of the *Review*, and I have no quarrel with the principles CIA is fighting to preserve" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 87). It is clear that James has betrayed Jerome. A fundamental difference in their personal myth systems is underpinned by their different ideas of nationality and honour. Jerome dramatically casts himself as Caesar to James's Brutus, then casts James as Judas, inferentially casting himself as Christ–all this because James has betrayed their friendship, and, even worse, Jerome's perception of the bond they shared at Oxford. Jerome is oblivious to an aspect of their bond that was important to James. Although he has condescendingly advised James during the dynamics of the latter's several failed marriages, he has never realised that James is sexually attracted to him. Jerome still clings to his notion of their Oxford undergraduate days, and couches his despair in poetic terms:

> The rhythm of life eluded him, like a complicated dance step attempted by a man wearing a deaf aid. I stumble against the metre, he thought, I cannot make my days scan. It may be funny for others, like bad poetry, like MacGonagall. But it's not funny for MacGonagall. (Warner, *Dark Wood* 93)

Jerome's romantic ideals are ones that James and his own family, Paula included, cannot

subscribe to and simply brush aside. Paula shrugs off his doting concern, and considers his fervent attempts to state that women are essentially superior in every aspect to men both useless and irrelevant. She is convinced (another feminist tenet) that a mere reversal of roles will solve nothing, and that her father simply does not understand.

However, Paula's personal beliefs converge with those of her father when they are in Sicily with Gabriel, and they profoundly disagree with his views on the alleged religious miracles that have taken place there. Despite the fact that Gabriel is the only character in the novel whom Warner specifically ties to the "dark wood" of its title, Paula and Jerome enter the dark wood of their spiritual beliefs along with Gabriel, for all that Jerome does not consider himself a religious man. Sicily, for all three of them, is the place where they each confront their own spiritual shadows, where they enter the "dark wood" of their personal myth systems, and emerge changed. Here, Jerome joins Paula to defend Maria Pia's visions against Gabriel's cynicism, and they join forces for different reasons. Although neither is a practising Christian, their personal myth systems both contain elements from early religious training, which they both find relevant in this crisis. Jerome's mother came from an extremely devout Roman Catholic family. Her parents were horrified when she married Henry Namier, a man with no religion, and insisted that their sons be brought up in the Catholic faith, which Paula was as well. The confrontations between Jerome, Paula, and Gabriel in Sicily highlight the antithetical aspects of Roman Catholicism that Warner explores so extensively in her study of the Virgin Mary.

Jerome argues that miracles should not be subjected to the rules and committees of the Catholic church, and that Maria Pia "sees the holy in the ordinary - that's the best

thing, the most poetic thing about Christianity, Gabriel, surely?" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 191). Jerome's poetic notions are, for once, eloquent instead of simply emotionally maudlin and overwrought. He states: "We do not have to experience the supernatural to see God. It's around us everywhere," and quotes from the *Book of Taliesin* about falling snow: "the angels were at their white joinery in heaven, and the saints were plucking their geese" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 191). Noted British poet Kathleen Raine argues that poetry is the language of "the *signatura rerum*, the 'signatures' and 'correspondences' of things earthly to things heavenly. . . . It is a sacred language because it speaks of qualities; and behind qualities, and sustaining them, mysteries, meanings; the holy ground of the soul's country" (Raine 23-4).[8] She writes of poetry being the language of longing, a way to somehow express the supernatural, through which we discover certain experiences otherwise inaccessible: "The imagination opens, now as always, into heavens and hells of the mind, beyond which lies boundless mystery" (Raine 23). Clearly, it is Jerome's path to the spiritual aspects of his personal myth system that offers him significant insights, even though that path is overgrown with negative aspects that result in his overwrought emotions and debilitating cynicism. Paula agrees with Jerome. She is aghast when her uncle dismissively says that the visions of Maria Pia would have been considered the Devil's work and the child herself considered a witch, had she lived in the seventeenth century. Impressed by the trustfulness of the men and women at the tawdry shrine to the

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[8] Kathleen Raine's lecture "Premises and Poetry" appears in her collection *The Inner Journey of the Poet and Other Papers* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982). She argues that imaginative learning is as self-consistent as modern science, and that poetry is important in our materialist way of life.

Virgin, Paula feels that cynicism is an unjustified response to sincere belief. It is not because Paula believes the Virgin to have an independent or objective life, or that she actually appeared to Maria Pia, that she defends the child's visions. To Paula, if Maria Pia sincerely believed, "she was expressing a truth, her truth, and others should be free to believe it if they chose" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 189). Eventually, Paula passionately exclaims "Each of us carries his own paradise inside him" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 191). Here, she echoes Raine's "heavens and hells of the mind,' and the Archangel Michael in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He promises a repentant and wiser Adam that by doing good Deeds, and with the help of Faith, Virtue, Patience, Temperance, and Love, "then wilt thou not be loath / To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far" (Milton, "Paradise Lost": Book XII, lines 585-7).[9]

Paula adds to these poetic insights from her own experience. To her, spiritual or poetic truths need to be balanced with an awareness of the economic and social realities of women's lives, and through her, Warner introduces a materialist feminist perspective. When Paula hears that Maria Pia and her mother are ostracised in the village because the child is the illegitimate daughter of a priest, she is outraged. To her, it is "fucking awful . . . being a woman in a Catholic country. First you get knocked up by the local representative of God almighty, and then you get dumped" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 195). Faced with Paula's vehement feminist commentary on sexuality, her father and uncle are shocked. Predictably, they immediately assume that she has had too much to drink, and

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[9] John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., New York: Macmillan, 1957).

assume their habitual patronising roles. However, despite her father's collusion with Gabriel, his support of her beliefs allows Paula to trust him enough to voice her deepest fears: "I want to connect, in some way that isn't through doing the same work, or borrowing the butter from upstairs, or . . . sex, of course. I want to grip someone without any of those things that usually, by chance, because there's nothing better, put one person in touch with another. . . . [Maria Pia] saw something else, something fabulous, which she used to stop the separateness, the unconnectedness . . ." (Warner, *Dark Wood* 196). Here, Paula expresses another notion that many feminists have considered significant: the importance of relations with others.[10] Paula's rare willingness to confide in him prompts Jerome to remonstrate with his brother, another rare occurrence. He thanks God that the acid of Catholicism has not bitten into his and Paula's soul the way it has into Gabriel's, and finally says "The curious thing is that you're a priest, yet you have no feeling for religion. I have, and Paula has, though we haven't any belief" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 198). Here Warner expresses what many feel about institutionalised religion–the feelings that caused her to leave the Catholic Church herself; the form is there, but the grace is gone.

The convergence of Paula's personal myth system with her father's does not continue after they return to London, but it has promoted a trust between them that allows them to be close in a way that has never been possible previously. It is as if they have travelled together "in a dark wood" and returned wiser for the experience. Paula

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[10] Warner anticipates Carol Gilligan's very influential study of the different ethical perspectives of women and men: *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

remembers something Gabriel has said: "the Taoists consider water the image of the highest good, because water is submissive and weak and yet can wear away the hardest stone and metal, and because it always flows downwards, seeking the lowest level" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 209). The image contrasts sharply with the Christian mystical notion of a rugged mountain to be painfully ascended to its summit. Paula resolutely decides to abandon her obsession with imposing her will on circumstance, "she would yield, and bend and go with the flow" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 209). Here, Warner appears to indicate that Chinese philosophy is more useful than feminism's vision of strong women. For his part, Jerome continues to vacillate between faith and cynicism. He quotes John Donne's "No Man is an Island," but then cynically states that Voltaire was correct in thinking each man is indeed alone. Amid his vacillations between belief and cynicism, Jerome can only point to his connection with his family as the cornerstone of his life.

Paula's relationship with Gabriel is much more fraught with tensions and misunderstandings than that with her father, and intense confrontations occur between their opposing beliefs. She listens to his tales of battles over astrology and religion in the court of the seventeenth-century Chinese emperor; she is present during his ecclesiastical examination of the miraculous appearances of the Virgin Mary in Italy; she goes with him to hear the antique dealer Wang interpret the Chinese Book of Changes. In each case, her own convictions are set against Gabriel's, and in spite of the power of his arguments, his experiences, his convictions, and her deep respect for him, Paula upholds her own spiritual views.

Gabriel's opinions interest Paula, and she appreciates the serious consideration and

approval he accords her intellectual ideas. She is also fascinated by his priestly vocation, admiring his uncompromising surrender to his role as a priest as she cannot imagine herself making such an unconditional commitment; Gabriel's face reminds Paula of a saint in a Crivelli altarpiece. After a deeply philosophical conversation about the stars, Paula is flattered by his attention and determines to seek his friendship. She is misled, as his focus slips rapidly to his work even as they talk, and he dismisses her as arrogantly as he does everyone: "He was above all an historian; contemporaries could rarely rival the past for his attentions" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 43). Gabriel considers no-one his equal. He inwardly mocks Paula's earnest attempts to resist the Catholic faith and to come to terms with feminism considering her young, afraid of being labelled, a pupil for him to instruct. Gabriel lies about remembering his early experiences in China, even though these memories preoccupy him increasingly. The initial conversation between Paula and Gabriel is the first confrontation between their personal beliefs, and an important initial illumination of the flaws in Gabriel's personal myth system that will destroy him.

Their conversation is a critical one for Warner's overall mapping of mythologies in her novel. It lays out the historical struggles of Roman Catholic and Chinese mythologies that took place in seventeenth-century China, and shows how those mythological struggles filtered down over time and across continents to become involved in the struggles between the personal myth systems of Paula and Gabriel. On the one hand, their talk serves to reveal the processes through which myths travel geographically and temporally. On the other, it allows Warner to present a very pertinent discussion of religious beliefs. Paula takes Gabriel to task for calling astrology superstition, noting that any religion can be

considered superstition to an unbeliever. In pressing Gabriel for a distinction between myth, religion and superstition, she uses the example of the seventeenth-century Jesuit mission in China, the subject of Gabriel's research, and Gabriel admits that she has hit upon the crux of the Jesuits' dilemma. The Jesuits gave the Chinese emperor their scientific knowledge in order to convert him to Christianity, but the Chinese used the Jesuits' scientific knowledge to promote their own religious practices. He also admits that the Jesuits were not above using Chinese superstitions to further their cause.

Pursuing her exploration of the theoretical connections between myth, religion, and superstition, Paula discusses her own approaches to the world of belief. She describes a very old hollow beech tree, with twisted roots, and gnarls and fissures in its trunk, which she has sketched often, intrigued and terrified by the images it evokes. She imagines it to have a life of its own: "Very strong mana, as some people would say" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 35). Gabriel, scoffing at such an "occult" notion, inquires if Paula looks for spirituality in such a heap of "flummery" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 35). She retorts, "At least they're looking for something. Isn't that better in your eyes than materialism? Surely you'd prefer a freak who'll only eat soya beans and meditate to an ad man who believes in nothing at all?" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 35). Astonishingly, Gabriel says he would indeed prefer the ad man. He comments that the Roman Catholic church historically persecuted those closest in belief to itself, causing Paula to wonder how he reconciles his cynicism and his own faith. Like his brother Jerome, he wavers between the two. Their conversation highlights Gabriel's cynical approach to spirituality, which will in the end be his undoing.

Warner allots to her character Gabriel the most repellent aspects of Roman Catholicism, characterising its priests as empty husks, void of belief or fervour, spouting dry, dusty rules unrelated to real life. Through Paula, she introduces an alternative way of looking at belief. Paula is convinced that she never was a Roman Catholic, despite being brought up in the faith, and firmly holds to her own, as yet relatively undeveloped, notions of the nature of belief. To Paula, religion is about belief in the supernatural: "It's got everything to do with magic and ritual, and nothing to do with practicalities or logic" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 35). She argues that Gabriel "up there in your splendid vestments muttering words over bread and wine" is really a shaman or witch doctor, rather than a moral philosopher or scientist (Warner, *Dark Wood* 35). Here, Warner suggests that Catholicism and so-called "primitive" religious practices spring from the same roots and fulfill the same functions. Questions around love and duty arise when they mention Paula's mother (whom Gabriel very much dislikes). Gabriel states that a child owes its parents love as a duty. Paula asks if a priest owes love as part of his priestly duties. Gabriel is taken aback, and defensively states that a priest should love no-one above God; for him this has been no hardship. Paula pities him. Here, again, Warner shows a Roman Catholic priest who has lost the point of his vocation, for he has completely lost sight of the love for others that Christianity holds to be all-important.

Paula and Gabriel confront each other again when they visit a Chinese antique-dealer and fortune-teller, who interprets the *I Ching*, the Book of Changes. Paula is shocked when Gabriel arrogantly assumes that Wang's words concerning the wisdom of the superior man (in Paula's fortune) describe Gabriel himself, but resents its warnings and

criticisms. Wang explains that innocence is indispensable for holding on to heavenly virtue, and urges, "Father Namier, you must not expose yourself to danger" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 154). Gabriel immediately relegates the Book of Changes to the status of occult nonsense. Wang warns that one cannot take from the Book what one pleases and disregard what displeases, but his advice falls on deaf ears, and Gabriel leaves abruptly, shocking Paula again. Gabriel lies again to Paula when he says that people have ceased to interest him, and this lie will lead him into the danger that Wang warns against. Gabriel attempts to defend his attitudes to the *I Ching* by explaining that it provoked one of the bitterest controversies of the Jesuit mission in China, for Jesuit priests disagreed among themselves whether the I Ching was occult nonsense and dangerous or a natural prodigy that could show God's will. Here, he is attempting to displace misgivings about his present circumstances back into history, but finally admits to Paula: "I don't know any more, my dear, you see" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 157). Paula is shocked once more at his confession and his haggard appearance. Gabriel imagines that Paula and others of her generation have a concept of the world corresponding to that in the *Book of Changes*: "It isn't patterned or rigid or organized, but ebbs and flows, in waves, ungoverned, ungovernable. They see order in disorder, they have no need of an ordainer. There is complexity, but not chaos; multiplicity, but not confusion" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 157). However, he cannot countenance such fluidity in his own personal myth system.

The final clash between Paula and Gabriel occurs in Sicily, where Jerome sides with Paula and Gabriel reaches a nadir of spiritual despair. He decides to report that Maria Pia's visions are illusions. He cites the child's illegitimacy, her mother's refusal to repent,

and their subsequent isolation from village life as reasons for the occurrence of the visions. He argues rationally that such spiritual manifestations occur when communities lose their status and slip into more primitive ways when progress leaves them behind. However, he deeply suspects himself of denying that God is manifest in all creation, and is uneasily aware that he harbours profound doubts about all connections between bodily senses and the divine. Yearning for divine peace and light untainted by any expression of the sensual and carnal, Gabriel is tormented, "suffering loss of faith like a haemorrhage" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 205). His conviction that the physical aspects of religion taint a love for God and his simultaneous yearning for an experience of the divine like Maria Pia's tear him apart. Gabriel struggles with the rift in his personal myth system at the deepest possible level. His training as a Jesuit necessitates his repudiation of every sensual experience connected to the divine. However, if he repudiates Maria Pia's visions, must he also repudiate Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, Christ's birth, St Thomas's probing of Christ's wounded side? Why cannot God be manifest in all creation, including the sensual, as Buddhists believe? Gabriel is morally bewildered and spiritually destitute, and the most dramatic confrontations in the novel occur within his psyche itself; his personal myth system is in chaos.

The strongly opposing aspects of Gabriel's personal myth system have been there from his childhood. He was born in China, and developed deep love of the Buddhist aspects of Chinese philosophy: the pantheism which sees unity, equality, and continual change in all of creation (like Tz'u-hsi). However, suffering severe asthma as a young boy, he was brought up in England by his strict, fervently religious Roman Catholic maternal

grandmother and directed into theological training. Thus, Gabriel's early influences were overlaid by his Jesuit training, with its extremely rigid rules. He became a Jesuit at age thirty-two, and thereafter resolutely adhered to a personal myth system which featured the use of his intellect and the rules he learned in the seminary. Thus, the two brothers both suffered from cultural displacement. Jerome, born in England and loving English culture, was brought up in China, while Gabriel, born in China and at home in that culture, was brought up in England.

Eschewing his earlier beliefs and enthusiastic acceptance of Chinese philosophical teachings was never easy for Gabriel. He wrote a book which explored the pantheistic aspects of the mysticism of Christian visionaries, in spite of his conviction that the mystical aspects of Christianity are dangerous territory for a Jesuit. However, while writing his book, Gabriel began to feel strongly that physical austerities, rather than mortifying and obliterating sensual desires, actually exacerbate and promote them. He chose not to reveal these thoughts in his book, but they remained burned into his memory. To his disgust, Gabriel's book was later taken up by psychics and others following the current fashion for occultism, which he abhors: "Religion . . . is not a question of feeling, but of intellect" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 198). Here again, Warner promotes the notion that Roman Catholicism is a matter of intellectual debate rather than sincere belief, and introduces a connection between myth and sexuality.

These themes continue in the novel as the conflicts in Gabriel's personal myth system are exacerbated through his work on the diaries of the seventeenth-century Jesuit

Andrea da Rocha.[11] He is disturbed by the politico-religious conflicts taking place at the Chinese court of the time, when Confucianism was the established religion of the court. As Warner explains in *The Dragon Empress*, Confucianism was based on reason and a strict social code of behaviour. Perceptively, the seventeenth-century Chinese emperor felt that Christianity had more in common with Buddhism than with Confucianism. He judged Christianity to be an essentially mystical religion, not one based on rationality and social codes, and his realisation promoted the failure of the Jesuit mission in China. The Jesuits backed the wrong horse when they rejected the pantheism of Buddhism, and supported Confucianism, for as he aged (like Tz'u-hsi) the emperor rejected Confucianism and became a confirmed Buddhist. After he died, his son ousted Christianity and deported all missionaries, and the Jesuit mission ended in failure. The emperor's focus on the mystical aspects of Christianity, and da Rocha's confession that he finds himself attracted to the pantheistic aspects of Chinese religious philosophy trouble Gabriel. He is suddenly horrified at his suspicion that the humanity of Christ is a mechanism to divert human passion toward God. He wonders, "Was the naked broken body of a young man only a device to channel the strong tide of passion toward the divine?" and cynically imagines that for Christianity, "it was necessary to use the imagery of flesh and skin and eye and nose and muscle and blood to move the hearts of the faithful" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 127). Gabriel responds to his devastating insights with terror, pleas for a return to his belief,

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[11] Warner explains in acknowledgements that Andrea da Rocha and his diaries are fictitious, but the seventeenth-century Jesuit mission in China is not, the circumstances of da Rocha's life are authentic, and Warner supplies historical sources (Warner, *Dark Wood* 247-50).

and, ultimately, deep cynicism and moral despair.

Gabriel's difficulties in dealing with anomalies, along with his refuge in cynicism, stem from myths about him which have circulated for many years among his family members and their friends and acquaintances. He has always been seen as wiser and cleverer than his older brother (and indeed than most people), because of his intellectual prowess and his training in philosophical thought. Habituated to admiration and attention, Gabriel is a stranger to self-doubt, and oblivious to the feelings of others. In spite of his lifetime commitment to his priestly vocation, his own personal myth system has solidified into a stone monolith, incapable of offering a life-affirming view of the world to himself or anyone else. Consequently, when challenges to his beliefs arise in his old age, he cannot imagine how to deal with them. Only two people in the novel see through the camouflage of piety with which Gabriel, aided by his relatives and friends, surrounds himself. A young male dancer, Wayne, a friend of Teresa's whom Gabriel considers frivolous, ill-mannered, and completely uneducated, discovers that Gabriel's astrological sign is Gemini: "Gemini are devious. . . . Like when they seem to be one thing, then they're really something else. Like Steppenwolf. Secret lives" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 29). Paula's sister Francesca, also an artist (a silversmith), criticises Gabriel harshly. She repudiates Paula's feeling that Gabriel is a man of complicated feelings and passions: "He's been a dried-up, juiceless bore all his life, pompous, conceited, tyrannizing everyone . . . He epitomizes for me everything that's sterile, that's the opposite of real, or good" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 105). Between them, the sisters see the two opposing aspects in their uncle that he cannot reconcile in himself.

Through both Gabriel and his seventeenth-century counterpart da Rocha, Warner examines the deep conflicts between religious belief and the exigencies of daily life. Da Rocha agreed to be a court astronomer, and used his considerable craftsman's gifts making intricate clocks and musical instruments. Faulting himself for undertaking unpriestly pastimes for the emperor's amusement, da Rocha experienced intense internal conflicts and self-doubts about accepting the self-indulgent and luxurious way of life at the Chinese court and being seduced into a Chinese way of thinking. Reading this, Gabriel's ambiguous feelings about the luxuries in his life, which he rationalises with argumentative sophistry, upset him. While cultivating a persona supposedly dedicated to self-denial, Gabriel has prompted his wealthy brother Jerome to buy things for him he cannot afford, frequently enjoys fine foods, wines and cigars at Jerome's house, and uses Jerome's study to do his work. He justifies all these indulgences by believing that, since he does not crave them, they are gifts bestowed by God that he should rightly enjoy.

The physical aspects of life play a significant part in Gabriel's work as well. To him it *is* the physical, and often the most frivolous aspects of the physical, that make his historical researches passionate. An expensive clockwork nightingale (paid for by Jerome), possibly made by da Rocha, causes history to come to life for Gabriel in a way that da Rocha's diaries, painstakingly handwritten in Latin with abbreviations and stylistic anomalies needing to be meticulously decoded, do not. For Gabriel, "history was the writing of scents and sights and pain and joy, not the dry ordering of documents, and he felt that he was working well only when his material leaped to life on the page" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 8). Here, Gabriel's view of history is diametrically opposed to Jerome's, and

Warner, a historical researcher herself, opposes two very different ways of doing research in their methods. Gabriel is supposedly the dry intellectual, wedded to rules and facts, and Jerome the poetically inspired romantic. Previously Gabriel has espoused a dry intellectual approach to religion where Paula and Jerome appreciate the passions of belief, but, quixotically, Gabriel's spiritual and moral crisis is precipitated by his intense passion for his work.

The underlying causes of Gabriel's crisis are encapsulated in the image of a Chinese rock prism that his father gave him on his twenty-first birthday. It has Chinese characters engraved on its surface saying, "This crystal is a piece of the true material of heaven. I, Ch'u Tai-su, wrote this poem" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 145). A Chinese scholar carved the prism because he admired his Jesuit teacher's learning, even though his theories disagreed with the scholar's own knowledge. Ptolemaic theory, long espoused by the Roman Catholic church and stating the earth is surrounded by crystal spheres and fixed stars, is the Jesuit's belief, but the Chinese scholar believed that stars float freely in space. Thus, the prism physically embodies the collision of Chinese and European myth systems that took place in the seventeenth century between the Roman Catholic church and Galileo. The latter's telescope revealed that the stars do indeed move freely in space, but he was convicted of heresy by the Inquisition and put under house arrest in 1633. The complex convergence of cultural and religious myths contained in the prism portray the convergence in Gabriel's personal myth system of Roman Catholic and Chinese beliefs. It also indicates the dynamics between the physical world, science, politics, religious belief, and faith. This is one of many instances where Warner uses art to illuminate aspects of

mythology operating in the life of one of her fictional characters. Moreover, Gabriel's behaviour with this artefact underlines his confusion around his sexual feelings.

Gabriel learns that da Rocha has been accused of a homosexual relationship with his manservant, and, once again, the words of the seventeenth-century Jesuit reverberate in Gabriel's present world. Gabriel is fascinated by a young instrument-maker and musical historian, Oliver Summers, curator at the Institute of Baroque Music next door to Jerome's house. Very taken with Oliver's blonde good looks and his blithe energetic way of looking at life, Gabriel begins to reward himself for long hours at his desk in Jerome's study with visits to Oliver, ostensibly to discuss da Rocha's musical instruments. Oliver's myth system is radically different from Gabriel's; his relationship to people and to the natural world is very intense and personal. To Oliver, the same ancient, scarred, hollow beech tree that fascinates Paula "is not an it. She is, well, she is all *she* and nothing else, the matrix, the womb" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 142-3). He takes Gabriel's arm as they walk, points his attention to the beauties around him, and tells him that his lifelong asthma is psychosomatic, curable and "all in the mind" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 142). Gabriel sees Oliver as a healer, who fills him with admiration, joy and thankfulness for God's universe. In Oliver's company, Gabriel feels that he can love God without feeling guilt or anxiety. Oliver's myth system coincides with the pantheistic aspects of Chinese philosophical thought so attractive to Gabriel, but the latter struggles to reconcile his joy in Oliver's company with his Roman Catholicism.

Gabriel feels an increasingly uneasy connection between da Rocha's reputed homosexuality and his own strong feelings for Oliver, and tries to rationalise them.

Oliver's smile causes the priest a spasm of pleasure in pain, for "the smile passed straight through his hard hide of lonely self-absorption" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 13). His fears spring from a deep and longstanding distrust in his own sexual feelings, stemming from his experience of sexual ecstasy when he and his brother Jerome, aged eight and ten, whipped each other after hearing stories of Biblical martyrdom. At that time he felt a kind of perversion in their imitation of Christ. Oliver's face reminds Gabriel sharply of an angel's face in a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, where the angel's smile is illuminated by light from the Christ Child. Jagged rocks in the painting have been psychologically interpreted as the womb, the *vagina dentata*, the terrifying danger to men that Christ escaped by his virgin birth. Over time, this angel's has come to epitomise an ideal for Gabriel which has enabled him to overcome his negative feelings about women. Somehow the light on the angel's face negates the terror of the jagged rocks; the sexless radiant angel affords a refuge from the physicality of women. Here, Warner uses art once more as an effective device to explain aspects of Gabriel's sexuality, and to show the inextricable imbrication of mythology and sexuality.[12]

Gabriel's conflicted feelings around sexuality begin with his upbringing in his grandmother's house. To him, she was a confusing model of womanhood. She was the womanly, perfumed figure with long red hair and a silken Chinese robe, soothing him in his illnesses. But she was also his gaoler, his "female demon," who imprisoned him in

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[12] Jamake Highwater addresses this connection in *Myth and Sexuality* (London and New York: Meridian, 1991). He argues that "each society's vision of destiny (its mythology, biases, fashions, and social attitudes) is the basis of its understanding of both the body and sexuality" (7).

stringent rules and Roman Catholic dogma (Warner, *Dark Wood* 119). Among the Jesuits, Gabriel was allowed no contact with women, for they were considered a constant peril: "Woman threatens us perpetually" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 165). He developed a strong aversion to women which provoked an extremely severe asthma attack during his first experience of sexual passion with a young woman. Gabriel, in his old age, is a man used to repressing every aspect of his sexuality suddenly confronted by strong feelings of sexual attraction, which he tries to rationalise as friendship. To make the situation worse, Gabriel has no idea that Oliver does not return his feelings and care for him in turn. Oliver is utterly disinterested in Gabriel's lectures on spiritual belief; symbolically, when Gabriel gives him his most prized possession, the rock crystal, Oliver does not want it.

Gabriel torments himself with thoughts of Oliver the entire time he is in Sicily, seriously compromising his ability to consider the case of Maria Pia's visions. Like Paula and Jerome, Gabriel is "in a dark wood" in Sicily, but, unlike them, he finds no reconciliation. Heeding neither the teachings of his Church nor the wisdom of the Chinese philosophers, he persists in his self-deception that his feelings for Oliver are harmless, and resolves not to seek help from his superiors. When he suddenly discovers that he is of no significance whatever to Oliver, Gabriel finally confronts his own sin: "Pride, he thought, pride is the enemy" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 226). Da Rocha's failure to convert the Chinese emperor, the failure of the Jesuit mission in China, his own dismissal of Maria Pia's religious sincerity, and his unreciprocated passion for Oliver, all converge: "He hated them all. Together they had dismantled the firm and unassailable structure of his life that he had assembled for over thirty years" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 234). Even in his extremity,

however, Gabriel wonders why "he should pay such a penalty of emptiness and anguish when lesser men lived bathed in love and wreathed in smiles and wrapped in secure faith and knowledge . . . " (Warner, *Dark Wood* 233). The myths about his own superiority are so strongly instilled in Gabriel's personal myth system that he simultaneously acknowledges his pride, the chief of the seven deadly sins, yet cannot free himself of it.

Gabriel recognises that Oliver has a life of his own which has nothing to do with Gabriel; the Oliver whose feelings and thoughts he imagines is his own false construction. Gabriel's innocence is lost, and he will enter, metaphorically and physically, the dark wood of the title and die. He has a recurring dream about a dark wood, a place where he runs over steep and stony ground through brambles and thorn trees. Alternately seduced by open, scented flowers and torn by thorns, he is pursued by four hounds: Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, and Prudence, the hounds of the angel Gabriel, his guardian and patron saint. Gabriel feels that the hounds strive to reclaim him, to return him to the virtue from which he flees, but he always awakens just as the first hound pins him down. His dream reinforces the conflicting aspects of Gabriel's personal myth system, where the sensuality of nature is attacked by the rigidities of Roman Catholicism. Gabriel dies when he enters a real dark wood, alone at night on the heath behind his brother's house, and there are no heavenly hounds to return him to virtue. Wang's prophesies are fulfilled. For Gabriel, his homosexuality is the danger. Gabriel's innocence is his obliviousness to his homosexual feelings, and the dark wood of his dreams is his own repressed sexuality, forbidden by his Church. Accompanied by Paula or Oliver, who are not bound by Roman Catholicism, he is safe in the dark wood; without them he is not. He is assaulted by young fag-bashers who

see in him a homosexual seeking an assignation. Choked by asthma, Gabriel dies at the foot of the old gnarled beech tree so fascinating to Oliver and Paula. Here, symbolically, Roman Catholicism is overcome by the Buddhist-like mythologies followed by Paula and Oliver, and by the "womb" of woman which he has always feared. The conflicts in his personal myth system have destroyed Gabriel.

His death holds other meanings for Paula. She feels responsible for his being out on the heath, for she had urged him to walk there to help his insomnia. She and Jerome are both convinced that there is no truth to the rumours about Gabriel's alleged homosexual activities. Jerome is elated, knowing that his own public ignominy has been overshadowed by his brother's disgrace, but Paula is distraught. She tells two sceptical visiting priests that Gabriel was an innocent about such things as homosexual liaisons. She castigates herself for turning away from him and attempts to draw his portrait, but leaves it unfinished. Her orderly apartment becomes unkempt and chaotic, carelessly strewn with clothes, dishes, books and artwork. Only when Oliver comes to visit, and explains his possession of Gabriel's engraved crystal prism, does Paula suddenly understand what has happened. She knew nothing of her uncle's friendship with Oliver or the existence of the prism. Paula realises with a burst of joy her own innocence in Gabriel's death. She has been as irrelevant to Gabriel as Gabriel was to Oliver: "This boy, he was the cause. This boy like a thousand others in London. Attractive, casual, open, pretty, with a nice smile" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 245). Oliver gives the prism to Paula, and "the iridescence exploded inside it, and shot rainbows all over the walls" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 246). A sense of joy, and an ability to forgive herself that have persistently eluded Gabriel elate Paula. She has a

flash of insight like the ray of sun scintillating in the blue sea in Warner's opening epigraph to the book, and she thinks of Wang and the *I Ching*:

> She thought, the changes really have tumbled through the particular lock that is my life. These are the shaken patterns of the *I Ching* - moments when the flux stops and falls into shape, when the pattern of clouds show[s] a tree, a monster, a face (Warner, *Dark Wood* 246).

She is so willing to let go of her need for control, that when she realises Oliver is sexually attracted to her, she decides to act on her own sexual desire without constraint and be intimate with Oliver as a remembrance of her uncle. Her belief in Gabriel's complicated feelings and passions is vindicated by the circumstances of his death. Once again she wants to be close to him despite his previous rejection of her friendship.

Paula chooses to be intimate with Oliver, though she does not love him, or even know him very well, with a certitude that appears as a direct contrast to her earlier tortuous feelings with regard to sexual relationships. She knows instinctively that Oliver is an opportunist, who uses his attractiveness to get what he wants without giving it much thought.[13] However, she decides to use him for her own purposes. Like her mother, she does acquiesce to a man, but for her own reasons: "Why the hell nót? I use my head too much" (Warner, *Dark Wood* 246). She thus follows her brother-in-law's advice, and her very practical mother's example. Paula might not see her mother as a role model, and from a feminist perspective considers her pathetic. However, after her experiences in Sicily and

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[13] Warner explains that his bisexuality and open approach to belief were planned to contrast with the rigid and oppressive attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to belief and sexuality (Interview with author, November 14, 2000).

Gabriel's death, she does in a sense follow her mother's example. Her quest for feminist self-definition, and her desire to become the hunter rather than the hunted have resulted in her becoming her mother, but with a difference. This is a feminist message, albeit perhaps a relatively different one. It may not throw out notions of womanhood thought to be constricting, but it does present an example of building on past accomplishments of older women, rather than rejecting the past completely and reinventing the wheel. The idea that a mother, no matter how "politically incorrect" she may appear, can offer qualities that are strengthening and helpful to her daughter's self-development, seems a good deal more productive a feminist stance than a permanent estrangement from one's mother. As Adrienne Rich points out: "Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (Rich 226).[14] Overall, despite Paula's reservations about her mother's behaviour and politics (or lack of them), Warner shows Paula wavering between resentment and admiration, exasperation and agreement. It is a very realistic mother-daughter relationship that Warner presents.

In a Dark Wood is an extremely complicated novel. It is Warner's first work of fiction, and she appears bound to include all the findings of all her previous research for *The Dragon*

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[14] Adrienne Rich's groundbreaking *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: William Norton, 1976) is a well-known feminist examination of motherhood which discusses relationships between mothers and their children.

Empress and *Alone of All Her Sex*, along with her feminist political views, in one book. In spite of its complexities, or even because of them, it is a most provocative novel on many levels. Warner manages to set Confucianism, Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, cultural attitudes to the war in Vietnam, homosexuality, occultism, astrology, astronomy, and, last but not least, feminism, all against each other in debate. In doing so, she manages to question each of these mythologies during the course of the novel. That she does so relatively even-handedly is characteristic of all her work, for with all her passionate commitment to women, Warner is a scrupulous scholar, whether writing fiction or fact. In a recent interview, Margaret Atwood states that being an artist and an activist are two very different activities. She cannot imagine putting advocacy speeches in a character's mouth, for by doing so she would lose the integrity of her art.[15] Warner might agree with Atwood, for she does not leave any of her characters with a clear line of thought. Like most people, they are confused and conflicted, and their personal myth systems afford only glimpses of a coherent world. These glimpses, like the Greek woollen strips described by Roberto Calasso which symbolise the connections between the visible and invisible worlds, are what give Warner's characters the impetus to act. The breadth of her focus on mythology, the intensity of her focus on individual women's lives, and the strong connections between the two are evident again in her second novel as well, although it differs considerably from her first.

The Skating Party

Marina Warner's second novel, divided into three sections, is like a jewel, with a

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[15] CBC Magazine, September 4, 2000.

glowing star at its centre. The bipartite structure that she favours in her fiction is clearly evident in the second and third sections of this text, where the third section, in the present, recapitulates the second section, set in the very distant mythic past. The first and third sections are in set in two very different locations, and they are separated by a brief, but very evocative, description of a hidden art treasure, *The Frescoes in the Bathroom of Cardinal Birbarotti*, a curious interposition occurring at the heart of the book. In this novel, Warner overturns the Freudian scenario of family relations, where a son is revolted and shocked by the discovery of his mother's lack of a penis, repudiates her, and rushes to join his father in the world of men. The heroine Viola and her son Timmo, on the contrary, are in an extremely close relationship which virtually excludes Michael, Viola's husband and Timmo's father. The three of them have a complex relationship, which Viola sees as a "triangular tension that sustained her family, like tent cords which strain one against the other for the kingpost to stand" (Warner, *Skating Party* 19). Eventually, Viola must deliberately choose to let her son go into an adult world of men, despite his reluctance, and she resolves her ambivalent feelings and arbitrarily acts. Their feelings–the anguish experienced by mother and son, and the fury of the husband/father–are all brilliantly encapsulated in Warner's glowing description of the Renaissance frescoes which comprises the centre-piece of the text.

The frescoes have been hidden in the Vatican for centuries. An American Renaissance art historian, examining sixteenth-century ground plans of the Vatican buildings, found what the mapmaker described as a bathroom, later bricked over to construct a staircase. Cardinal Birbarotti, who had the bathroom built, was a humanist

Greek scholar, an assiduous reader of the manuscripts in the library of the Emperor of Byzantium. He returned to Rome with some of the most fascinating manuscripts of the ancient world, some of which still remain in the Vatican library. Here, Warner gives another example of how myths travel the world, and her very detailed and vivid descriptions of the frescoes provide much resonance to her story. Birbarotti had the frescoes painted, and Viola, a professional art historian, was among those present when they were unearthed centuries later.

The frescoes, enclosed as they were in the Renaissance bathroom, had been perfectly preserved, and their quality and colour were fresh and beautiful. It seemed as if the past were present in the room. However, the narrative remained to be deciphered, as none of the researchers knew the story depicted on the walls. When she understands the meanings of the past, the future will fall into place for Viola, and she must understand the past in both her life and her work. Aside from the story contained in the frescoes, they play a role in Warner's writing process. Like Italo Calvino's writing, hers is often fuelled by pictorial images:

> I'm actually interested in the limits of language and of course colour is one of the areas where there's a difficulty. The eye perceives more than language can tell. Consider, for example, the colour of one's eyes. Language cannot follow the complexity of human perception. So in a way, to some extent, the whole task of writing is to try and catch perception, to make a record of it, to capture its fleeting impulses. And of course emotions are very hard to capture. Besides, there's a sensuous side to it: I

do like looking at pictures a lot (Zabus, "Spinning" 524).

Here, it is clear what Warner's descriptions of the frescoes accomplish for her, the writer. She can portray the feelings of her characters using all the dramatic imagery contained in the paintings. Colour, texture, form, light, they are all available to her in a way that would seem extraordinarily overwritten if she were simply describing how her characters feel instead of describing a work of art. Thus, in this text, she uses art to indulge her penchant for rich and ornate writing, and to provide a condensed version of the plot.

Warner uses another painting, *The Judgement of Cambyses*, a diptych (two-leaved painting) by Gerard David, to illuminate an aspect of Viola's character. Warner's descriptions of the painting are again evocative and very dramatic, as she delineates the scene of a violent execution. Viola, in her postgraduate thesis, terms it "a prime example of the dependence of aesthetic value on meaning" (Warner, *Skating Party* 81). Depending on the viewer's knowledge of the story behind the scene, the painting can be seen as a martyrdom, or the just punishment of a tyrant. Moreover, knowing the circumstances at the time of the work's creation adds another layer of meaning. The features of the victim are those of a corrupt judge of the time, and the bystanders are members of the local Town Council and their wives. Viola realises that the viewer's choices expand as a depth of knowledge increases. She also perceives the perspectives possible when looking at a painting, which accords with her own personal view of life: "Things seem to me so floating, changing from whatever view you take of them" (Warner, *Skating Party* 93). Viola, like Paula, is always able to see the other side(s) of any issue. She notes that the story in the painting "rises from its original, almost vulgar level of cautionary tale and

becomes a fully articulated tragedy . . . The figures in the painting stir pity and fear at the human condition, at human presumption and human cruelty" (Warner, *Skating Party* 83). Through Viola's preoccupation with the meaning of the painting, Warner leads us yet again to consider the travels of myth. The original source story came from Persia, and was recounted in the *Histories* of Herodotus. David painted his diptych retelling the tale in Bruges, centuries later. Freed from its circumstantial inspirations, the painting has become larger in its implications, just as myths and legends do over time. As Viola's professional career has developed, pondering the ultimate meanings of pictures has become a passion with her.

Viola, like Paula in *Dark Wood*, first appears as a subordinate figure. Actually, Viola is almost Paula, later in life. Their beliefs and attitudes are extraordinarily similar, and so is their physical appearance. Viola is slim and vivacious, very attractive for her age. However, she feels self-defined only through motherhood, confessing to her friend Jimmy that she has no idea what her life would be like if her son did not exist: "He's the only thing I can take straight on, without feeling set apart . . . Timmo is the only element in my life that really involves me" (Warner, *Skating Party* 9). She has allowed her child to take up all her emotional energy in ways that have sidelined her relationship with Michael. Warner uses a strong mythical symbol to describe the wedge that their son has driven between Viola and Michael: "the three-year-old, not content at placing himself between his mother and his father in bed, had sometimes peed sleepily into the mattress, as effective

a restraint as Tristan's naked sword"(Warner, *Skating Party* 19).[16] Over the years, Viola has become more and more disloyal to Michael, keeping him increasingly at a distance and teaching her son to do the same. They have become conspirators against Michael; Viola feels he does not need her. Now that he is maturing sexually, Timmo feels a deep sense of shame: a need to separate himself physically from his mother. He refuses to let her touch him, and reacts violently by shouting at her when she enters his room unexpectedly when he is naked. Paradoxically, Viola feels separated from her son by his newly discovered sexuality, but at the same time considers that it somehow belongs to her by right. Viola feels guilt at taking her son's side against his father, but also resents the self-sufficiency that Michael displays with his good-natured acceptance of the situation.

Viola's estrangement from Michael may have begun with the advent of their son, but it also results from a deep rift between them stemming from their beliefs. Although she fell in love with Michael because of the "divine fury" that his colleague Professor Wilton sees in him, she cannot agree with his single-minded perspective. Viola feels about Michael's views as Paula did about Gabriel's dedication to the priesthood: "I can never manage his kind of conviction" (Warner, *Skating Party* 93). Unlike Paula, however, Viola sees the negative side of such single-mindedness. She can acknowledge and empathise with other people's ideas and perspectives, while Michael can see only his own. Viola thinks of herself as an observer, but feels sad that her watching sidelines her from wholehearted involvement and participation, except for her mothering. Like Paula, who

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[16] In the Celtic story of Tristan and Isolde, retold over centuries in many languages and versions, a naked sword was placed in a bed to prevent sexual intercourse.

watches because she is an artist, Viola watches because she understands painters and appreciates their work. Thus, she watches Michael and appreciates his performances, but she sees his moral earnestness as his own interior landscape, fictionally contrived, and cannot make the leap of faith necessary to believe fully in his causes. To Viola, marches and public singing signify patriotism, armies, church, and support of state institutions that she believes are either naive or dangerous. She sees Michael's adherence to these causes as a way of professing a faith which she cannot follow. Viola frames her resistance to his political passions in terms of rejecting a commitment to a religious faith. Thinking back to anti-nuclear marches, Viola imagines the marchers walking "as novices walk up the aisle in the white dress of belief and trust, taking an unaccountable risk on the future and plighting ourselves to the unknown" (Warner, *Skating Party* 96). Here, Viola echoes Warner's own resistance to the Roman Catholic Church in her previous texts. Viola mourns the loss of both her belief in Michael, and her sense of pity for his unrealistic idealism. Instead, she feels that his political commitment is at times callous, rather than right, and finds herself more and more irritated with Michael's politics. From being Michael's chief audience and strongest moral support, she has become his severest critic.

Their philosophical differences were evident when they met as university students. Shortly after they fell in love, Viola discovered that she was pregnant. Michael did not refute his part in the pregnancy, and he travelled with her to the abortion clinic. However, his usual ebullience vanished, and he retreated into silent unhappiness. He and Viola never discussed any of the issues around the pregnancy, then or later, and Viola also retreated into silence. She felt as if the abortion were an accident that happened to her, rather than

the result of her own personal, responsible choice. Her unborn child seemed to her like a hard, unripe, green fruit torn from her body, and she was desolate. Despite their (clumsy) precautions, a second pregnancy occurred eighteen months later. This time, Viola declared she could not undertake another abortion and they married.

The next, extremely significant, clash between Viola and Michael occurs when he is doing fieldwork among the Idia, a people living on the South Sea island of Palau. A young academic in a white heat of enthusiasm for his work, Michael embraces the Idia culture and mythology wholeheartedly until it virtually displaces his own cultural beliefs. Because the Idia perform many rituals of propitiation to keep order between their real world and the spirit world, Michael does as well. He never swims in the ocean, which they consider taboo and peopled with ghosts, and he looks for the fresh garlands of frangipani that they use to designate safe places. Feeling guilty because he does not miss Viola and his young son more, he invites them to join him on Palau. Through them he seeks to regain the appropriate critical distance from the Idia culture necessary to do his research effectively (the critical distance touted by Jerome in *Dark Wood*). After a time, however, Michael feels that they impede his deep emotional involvement with his work, and wishes them gone. His feelings of alienation from Viola reach a crisis point when she insists on accompanying him to an Idia ritual.

To attend this particular ritual called the Ghost Dance is a crowning achievement in Michael's work, and he wants to participate in it with no inhibiting cynicism. As they pick their way along the beach in the darkness following the sound of the drums, Viola confronts Michael with his own frequent statement: "spells are binding only on the

consenting" (Warner, *Skating Party* 41). This is the first instance of the mythological crux of the book, which reappears at several other key points in the book. Here, Viola quotes it to Michael as one of his precepts, arguing that he should not be bound by the spells of the Idia mythology. When they arrive at the ritual ground, Michael is surprised to find it in the usual marketplace. Viola reminds Michael that he says the Idia gods exist everywhere; there is no particular holy place for them. Her second attempt to lessen Michael's intense identification with Idia mythology, like the first one, fails. Thus, before the ceremony, Viola is practical and hard-headed, and Michael, the passionate believer.

During the ritual, young male dancers are bewitched into a trance, but one dancer cannot complete the ritual, confessing to the priest that he has been bewitched by a young girl. She is asked to confess, but refuses, stating that if her body has enchanted the youth she is not to blame. Her form "is the god's habitation and his making"(Warner, *Skating Party* 51). She will not consent to the spell of the priests and confess that she bewitched the youth. Taken by the priests to a temple in the woods, she is fed only water, and is a voluntary prisoner, unchained and free to leave. Steadfastly refusing to betray her own innocence, she eventually starves to death. Viola is aghast, shouting at Michael: "That girl is dying and you are doing nothing" (Warner, *Skating Party* 49). The conflict between them escalates. Here, they change roles, with Michael the hard-headed researcher and Viola the passionate believer. Michael is thrilled at having a professional opportunity that few in his field have ever experienced. Exhilarated, he writes of the caste divisions, witchcraft as social control, and the priesthood wielding its power, heedless of Viola's horrified protests. Logically, he argues that the beliefs of the Idia are important in their

culture, and interlopers have no right to interfere. He explains to Viola that since the girl is of a higher caste than the young man, a match between them is impossible, forcing the ultimate authority, the priests, to restore the social order. Michael vehemently states that he and Viola could not behave like missionaries, and become dangerous meddlers. To him, their duties at home in their own culture are entirely different. At the girl's funeral, Michael is gratified when the Idia offer him a wreath, and tell him that his presence will be inscribed in their palm-leaf chronicles. Unlike Gabriel in *Dark Wood*, Michael is observing the beliefs of the local inhabitants of the island, but does not seek to judge them. Viola cannot understand why Michael, the social crusader, stands by and lets the girl die. According to her personal myth system, "[t]here must be an absolute moral law, there must. Or we're brutes" (Warner, *Skating Party* 102). Michael scornfully argues that a law which differs from established custom has no force. Viola takes food to the girl every day without Michael's knowledge. She tries her hardest to subvert the intent of the priests, to no avail. Viola is deeply disturbed by Michael's refusal to intervene, and never forgives him. Like Jerome and Teresa, Michael and Viola are estranged. The way that they alternate between practicality and passion indicates that myth systems display the same fluidity and unpredictability as Calasso's descriptions of the nature of myths themselves.

Viola's resistance to Michael is emulated by their son Timmo. He resembles his mother physically, but where she has an air of alertness and a graceful control, he is gangly and awkward. Like his body, which is experiencing a profusion of hormones, his personal myth system is in turmoil. He is not comfortable with an empty temple in Palau, vacated by the god except on a feast day, or Italian churches, with the Christian god attended on a

daily basis. Timmo is thrilled only by science, and is averse to symbolism. He looks for reassurance in mathematical forms and scientific calculations, finding in them an essence, a formula to explain the nature of space: "It's not magic. It's much bigger than magic" (Warner, *Skating Party* 70). His struggles to find his own meanings in the world are complicated by the tensions between his parents; he is distressed by his father's infidelity and his mother's pain. His connection with his mother is turning from dependence to protectiveness, while his rebellion against his father is becoming constant and embittered. Rather than identifying with his father, he continually denigrates him, calling him a "wanker." He turns to rock music, the more obscene the better, as a substitute for the ogres, crones and pitiless enchantresses of fairy tales. He appreciates the rage in their lyrics and the outrageous way they portray perversion and malignancy, echoing the separateness he feels from the adult world. Michael reacts by being a controlling authoritative parent, which alienates Timmo still further.

As Jerome and Gabriel did in *Dark Wood*, Warner's male protagonist occupies a prominent place at the outset of *Skating Party*. Michael Lovage is a very action-oriented man, with great physical and emotional energies. His name Lovage (probably with ironic intent on Warner's part), is an old English herb used as a domestic herbal remedy! In his youth, Michael was a leader in university activism. Tall, intelligent, energetic, and persuasive, with an easy-going extroverted presence, he dominated public gatherings. His effervescence was captivating and effortless, his energies were tireless and his convictions deep. He was a powerful letter-writer, pamphleteer distributer, and lobbyist for nuclear disarmament. Michael's anthropological research led to major studies, and at thirty-nine,

he is a university professor, successful in his career, and respected by his colleagues. He is still admired for his passionate advocacy on behalf of political causes, which he now carries on worldwide. His older colleague Professor Wilton fervently admires his unquenchable optimism and energies and says to Viola: "He's a man of the enlightenment, full of power, full of belief in his power. He's a model for us all" (Warner, *Skating Party* 93).

At the time of the skating party, Michael is embroiled in an affair with Katy Ordel, a university student of eighteen, more than twenty years younger than himself. He habitually investigates the characters of new acquaintances as if delving into a new story in which he can immerse himself, but at the same time can experience distantly, as he does with his research. Michael feels young and vigorous again as he explains his early field-work to Katy, and she finds his descriptions of the Idia fascinating. He says that they are "the most civilised, artistic, fascinating people you could imagine. So far from savage, they make us look like cave-men" (Warner, *Skating Party* 34). Here, Michael displays the same fascination with the mythology of a foreign culture as Gabriel does in *Dark Wood*. Katy's reaction echoes Viola's feelings when she states firmly: "It's . . . barbaric" (Warner, *Skating Party* 33). Michael defends the Idia by querying if their practices are any more barbaric than the role conditioning of English society. Here, again, Warner sets the mythology of one culture against those of another to question both. She also shows that Michael, in the process of investigating the Idia and Katy, has no qualms about exploitation in either case.

Michael searches for the same thing in Katy that fascinates him in the palm-leaf

chronicles of the Idia, for he sees her, like them, as precious. However, Michael demonstrates that he has also will callously use what he terms "precious" for his own ends. The chronicles, now under glass in a museum, seen only by researchers, "stimulated him to tears: these withered bits of palm were true relics, numinous progenitors. Their only antecedent was reality itself" (Warner, *Skating Party* 164). Like Jerome in *Dark Wood*, Michael is overly sentimental in his feelings, but amazingly callous in his actions. Michael was instrumental in removing this living mythological record (for it was currently in use when he was in Palau) from its native setting, transporting it from Palau to Britain, and putting it forever beyond the reach of any human being, particularly the Idia. Similarly, Michael uses Katy to regain the intense feelings of his youth, and enjoy unconditional love, although in return he is dishonest with her, for he has no intention of leaving his wife.

The present repeats the past when Michael is with Katy on a street in London and several young people steal money from an old tramp playing a harmonica. Katy shrieks at him, "Do something, do something about it" (Warner, *Skating Party* 77). He tries, ineffectually, to persuade the youths to return the money, but fails. He admits to Katy that he was afraid, and could not look them in the eye: "I stood there, and all that kept on going through my head was 'No man is an island' . . . Absurd!" (Warner, *Skating Party* 79). Michael, the man of strong political convictions, has no idea how to react when it comes to ethical issues. The same phrase emerges almost unconsciously that emerges for Jerome in *Dark Wood*. Donne's notion of communal responsibility occurs to both men when they are faced with violence, but neither has the moral conviction to follow its implications. Their intellectual training has resulted in their developing attitudes of

cynicism and relativism, which prevent them from acting on their beliefs. When Katy asks if they could at least give the tramp some money, he refuses, saying the tramp would only spend it on drink. Here, Michael displays the same deep cynicism as Gabriel and Jerome. Thus, all three of Warner's chief male protagonists display the same characteristics, and all can be seen as products of what she terms the British "cult of reason." Moreover, they all situate themselves in relation to John Donne's meditation, which Warner feels has been very influential in British life.[17] Younger writer Jeanette Winterson finds the same poem useful, but treats it even more cynically than Warner's characters: "The bell tolls and we have found that every man has become an island and every woman too. Never mind, the salesman says I can call you on our mobile phone" (Winterson 185).[18] Gabriel, Jerome, and Michael want to believe Donne's words, yet find themselves completely isolated and cannot determine why. They all appear to fail when they search for meaning in times of crisis.

To bolster his self-image, Michael seeks to enchant Katy with tales of the Idia culture, using the exotic to achieve his personal ends yet again. He employs the same means to bring Katy to his point of view as he did with Viola in Palau: argumentative sophistry. He makes love to Katy, but will never fully have intercourse with her, or allow her to sexually satisfy him. Thus, he convinces himself that he is not actually being unfaithful to Viola. He tells Katy that their love is wrong because of their age differences,

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[17] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

[18] Jeanette Winterson's *The World and Other Places* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), includes a story that (like Warner's male characters) simultaneously sneers at faith and acknowledges our deep need for it..

then is hurt when Katy treats him as an authority figure. He is oblivious, as Katy is not, to his insistence on remaining in complete control of their relationship, both emotionally and physically. Realising the sophistry of his arguments, he still cannot bring himself to be honest with her. Michael explains that in the Idia culture, children dance to exorcise evil, and their beauty and innocence create a kind of barrier between the spectators of the dance and potentially harmful spirits. Evil is ascribed to children, as it was to the young girl many years ago, to protect those watching from it. While he is speaking, it occurs to Michael that the innocent are the most vulnerable to attack, and that it is the young who are witches, but he keeps this thought to himself. He tells Katy that the Idia process does work, and that one needs belief to be strong and clean and new, restored to inner peace as the Idia were after their rituals. People once had belief in England, he explains, but he is not sure it was a good thing. Then, just before he asks her if he can kiss her for the first time, he states: "spells are binding only on the consenting. Witchcraft between consenting adults, you might say" (Warner, *Skating Party* 52). This is the second instance in the novel when the phrase appears, and for a second time it is used to denigrate the world of myth. Initially, it signified Viola's rejection of Michael's identification with Idia mythology. Now, it signifies Michael's using ritual and belief as bait to capture Katy's affections.

Katy believes in Michael. She is mesmerised by him, flattered by his attentions, and fascinated by his accounts of Palau. Her only unhappiness stems from Michael's unwillingness to let her move him sexually as deeply as he moves her, and his refusal to abandon his wife. To Katy, Michael is a teacher, and therefore ageless, and she also fails to be persuaded by his notion of a moral difference between his making love to her and her

making love to him. Katy's view of the world has been shattered by her father's sudden death. It happened just as she was approaching puberty, experiencing the same shame over the start of her menses that Timmo experiences over his pubescent body. Katy's father, who had a career in the army, had been posted to Britain for the first time since her birth. He wanted to create a green lawn, which he had longed for during many years surrounded by heat, deserts, and sand. Katy was turning cartwheels on the newly completed lawn when he suffered a sudden thrombosis and died instantly. Since then, Katy has been unable to finish anything, and longs to return to a simpler time when she never questioned her father's moral precepts. She is taking Classics at the university, and explains to Michael "They knew it all . . .. The same things hurt, then as now" (Warner, *Skating Party* 26).

Katy is a budding feminist, very appreciative of a female professor she admires. She relates to Michael how Miss Sidmouth was a scholarship student, and experienced class discrimination when attending university. She and her mother, a former lady's maid, met her mother's previous employer on the street, who said, "Sidmouth, your girl will be moving beyond her station. Mr James and Mr Charles went there" (Warner, *Skating Party* 28). Katy finds this attitude incredible, and values what women like Miss Sidmouth have done to make the university world a better one for women. Katy's own studies interest her, in spite of her phobia about finishing any project, even reading to the end of a novel. She thinks about lives of various heroines such as Aurora Leigh, Catullus's Lesbia, Jean Rhys's woeful women, and Alexandra Kollontai, as if they were "prospectuses of career advisory centres" (Warner, *Skating Party* 73). Katy can imagine herself as any one of them as she reads, and at the same time think of herself as a blank page on which she could

write her own reality. She rebels against the adult world by dying her hair jet black and wearing it spiked, whitening her lips, and smoking, rather awkwardly, in an attempt to appear worldly and depraved. Because Michael will not have intercourse with her, Katy defiantly sleeps with a fellow-student. When her period is late, she imagines herself obtaining her university degree while caring for her baby, despite the inevitable disapproval of her tutors. She conceives of the child as Michael's though that is an impossibility. While skating, she knows her period has begun, and feels an exhilarating sense of freedom. Like Paula, and Viola, Katy is torn between wanting desperately to be her own woman, and wanting intimacy with others. When Viola and Katy meet at Michael's skating party, they conceive of ways to move past their contingent problems.

Warner's settings for *The Skating Party* do much more than provide a locale for the action. They are fairy-tale settings, and, as such, remove the story from the realm of the everyday and place it in the realm of the timeless, the world inhabited by the frescoes in the Cardinal's bathroom. The first section of the book is set in a magic world of frost and ice. The river Floe, which runs by the college, is frozen, a very unusual occurrence in the temperate climate of southern England. The trees at the river's edge are rimed in sparkling crystals, and brilliant green grass shows in patches through the hoarfrost. The whiteness and cold soak up sound so that an uncanny hush encases the voices of the skaters and the crunch of their skates. The ice itself is clear, and the skaters' tracks are interwoven delicate patterns on the surface. The skaters in this sparkling white world "felt transported by its uncanniness, by the petrification of familiar sights, by the still buildings majestically moored on a blank wilderness" (Warner, *Skating Party* 11). Here, they leave

the world of the familiar to set out on an adventure of inner discovery. The stasis of the frozen winter landscape echoes the stalemates in the relationships between Viola and Michael, and between Michael and Katy. When the skaters attain the open country, they have a feeling of trespassing against the stillness of nature's winter ritual, and are exhilarated by a sense of transgression. Warner has effectively created a world where the boundaries between reality and fantasy seem blurred. It is a theatrical stage, upon which a mythological story with its roots in the distant past will play itself out. In the case of *Dark Wood*, the chief theatrical stages (excluding the stage where Teresa actually performs) are in the characters' heads. In *Skating Party*, there are three stages: the winter world of the frozen river; the Cardinal's bathroom; and, lastly, the Lovage home. Here, the threads of Warner's story converge, and the characters gradually emerge from the realm of the fabulous to the realm of the everyday. Whitelode Farm is near the frozen river Floe, and the Whitelode brook runs past the house, which is situated "on the brink of water rushing to return to earth and darkness" (Warner, *Skating Party* 131). Just as the frozen ice of the river gives way to the dark flowing open water of the brook, the deadlocks between Michael and Viola, and Michael and Katy, are broken.

The novel's third and final section carries an epigraph: "Like diamonds we are cut by our own dust" (Warner, *Skating Party* 115). The dust in this case is unresolved philosophical differences between Michael and the women in his life. On the way to Whitelode Farm, driving with her friend Jimmy, Viola suddenly realises that there is another, very serious, problem between her and Michael. Jimmy is a gay man, and Warner presents his view of love and sexuality as a contrast to Viola's heterosexual perspective.

Here, homosexuality does not carry the stigma that it does in *Dark Wood*, nor is it portrayed as dangerous or scandalous. Jimmy is a very close friend to both Michael and Viola; it is to Jimmy that she reveals her deepest hopes and fears. While skating, they have a lengthy discussion about his experiences as a homosexual. Viola stoutly disagrees with Jimmy that his gay encounters are more romantic than sex: "That's a real homosexual's remark. To us heteros, there's nothing more romantic than sex" (Warner, *Skating Party* 57). Jimmy goes on to explain that his younger lover Andrew, like many young people, keeps his innocence through seeking "a total knowledge of possible evil" so that he is in a sense protected from hurt by being "streetwise" (Warner, *Skating Party* 59). Andrew does not consider himself a homosexual, explains Jimmy, but a person open to any sexual experience.[19] Viola confesses to Jimmy that she is at times squeamish, hearing his expositions of gay life, although at the same time she envies aspects of it. As they talk of Michael's behaviour with Katy, Jimmy scoffs at Viola: " You heterosexuals, so monogamous. You expect too much. Too much loyalty, too much intensity. You take it all to heart too much" (Warner, *Skating Party* 132). Viola is suddenly stricken to realise that Jimmy assumes Michael and Katy are having a sexual relationship. Jimmy is contrite, and says she should feel sorry for Michael, who deludes himself imagining that his student is really interested in him when she is only looking for attention. Viola is really frightened, and confides to Jimmy: "When it comes to politics, his . . . intransigence . . . is well, noble,

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[19] Warner likens Andrew to Oliver in *Dark Wood*, in that both men's bisexuality escape the strictures of church and society regarding gender roles in sexual relationships. They both demonstrate a kind of freedom from stereotypical heterosexual ideas and behaviours (Interview with author, November 14, 2000).

but when it comes to people, he's reckless" (Warner, *Skating Party* 133). Viola's almost wilful blindness about Michael has been stripped away.

Katy's blinkers concerning the real nature of her relationship with Michael are also removed. During lunchtime, Michael and Viola are obviously a team, his roots are obviously in his home, and his marriage is not the dead husk Katy has imagined. She says bitterly to Michael, "I'm just your bit on the side" (Warner, *Skating Party* 139). Moreover, amid conversations ranging from vegetarianism to sex, to the pill, and to the victimisation of women, Viola chooses to tell Katy the story of Palau from her perspective. Viola is impressed with Katy, while the latter is touched that Viola is honest with her and takes her seriously. Viola, half-blaming the wine she has drunk for what she sees as an unfair betrayal of Michael, follows her conversation with Katy with more deliberate action.

When Timmo confronts Viola in the kitchen, scorning her deliberate pretense that nothing is happening between Michael and Katy, she cannot hide her tears. Here, Viola's body posture and clothing echoes that of the woman in the frescoes as she holds herself, rocking, the folds of her clothes pulled taut across her body. She is torn between loyalty to her son and to her husband. In the end, she asks Timmo to distract Katy, and knows that by doing so she is breaching their previous unspoken contract, with its implicitly understood rule that he relies on her and she lays no claims on him. Once more, mother and son are joined against husband/father, but this time, their joint efforts will result in their complicity being forever compromised. Timmo and Katy, retreating upstairs away from the adults to listen to music, talk about their aspirations, their parents, and sexual

relationships. He asks if she will make love with him, and they end up in bed, their bodies as child-like as the bodies of the young man and the girl in the frescoes. Together, Katy and Timmo have successfully rebelled against the authoritarian figure of Michael: Timmo is avenging his father's treatment of his mother, and Katy is freeing herself from her need for Michael's love. Michael is outraged and devastated at once, attacking Timmo and calling Katy a little whore, echoing the rage of the father in the frescoes. Viola, hearing the disturbance upstairs, knows what has happened. Recalling her abortion, she has "a memory of green fruit, falling," and deeply mourns the loss of her son (Warner, *Skating Party* 167). They will never be a symbiotic whole again, but two separate people. However, Viola realises that the loss for her is healthy for her son; he needs to learn to be his own person, autonomous and strong in his own right.

Despite her sorrow, Viola is a pragmatic wife, like Teresa in *Dark Wood*. She cares for her shattered husband and sees to the remaining guests. Jimmy admonishes her not to let Michael down: "He needs your support. No irony Viola, not this time, not at his expense. He's a man with real scruples, and that's something" (Warner, *Skating Party* 172). Viola agrees. However, she becomes absolutely forgetful of her husband and his entanglements when Professor Wilton suddenly solves the mystery of the narrative in the frescoes. He arises from his after-lunch nap and says sleepily "Old Wolf, young wolf. Don't give it a moment's thought dear lady. Such an old story . . . Forgive the pedantry of an old man . . . but Homer is so beautiful, and the story of Phoinix one of the most beautiful of all" (Warner, *Skating Party* 172). Viola's mind reels. Her body explodes in goose bumps, and her heart races. Her work suddenly takes precedence over Michael's

need for her, as her care for her child once did. The *Iliad* was in the Cardinal's library, and the frescoes tell the story of the young man who responds to his mother's pleas by taking his father's concubine to bed. Viola is so excited that she can scarcely focus. She begins puzzling over the Amazons on the north wall, for there was no Amazon story that she was aware of entangled with Homer's tale of sexual revenge. She must resolve the remainder of the riddle, and Michael's problems come second.

Professor Wilton, the Needham Professor of the History of Science at the university where Michael teaches, is a curious figure in the novel. Like the fairy-tale setting of ice and snow, he seems to come from a world of magic, like the mysterious figures who appear unexpectedly in fairy tales to make cryptic comments, foretell the future, give directions, or suddenly appear and save the day. He has long white hair, papery fingers, and glides across the ice as if he were born on skates, despite his age. Wilton is a self-appointed custodian of tradition at the university. He deplored the admission of women students and teachers, and continually urges ridiculous measures like preventing anyone in high heels or other barbarian footwear from walking on the college lawns. However, his extreme conservatism is countered by his being professionally extraordinarily progressive.[20] He is extremely sympathetic and respectful to Timmo about his studies, encouraging his thinking, and convinced that Timmo will do well at university. He explains to Viola that rebellious young people use science to create a new symbolic

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[20] Warner explains that she encountered many such men at Cambridge University, during a visiting lectureship; incredibly progressive intellectually, they were equally incredibly reactionary in their dealings with people in their daily lives (Interview with author, November 14, 2000).

order. Although Viola sees Wilton as a eunuch, with a homosexual dream of a pure, male academy, he is as respectful of Viola's work as he is of Timmo's and questions her at length about it. He also shares his thoughts with her, musing that as they skate that the Chinese were right to number five elements, with wood the fifth. He tells Viola a story about his past when he, a young boy, admired some older boys so much that he ate roasted horse chestnuts they offered him, knowing they were unfit to eat. When the boys laughed at him, he was devastated. He quotes Catullus's *Odi et amo* to Viola; an appropriate poem for the present state of mind of all the chief characters in the novel at this point, it speaks of the tortuous feelings and sufferings connected with love. Wilton explains to some students that the phenomenon of dead twigs sprouting was not at all impossible, a symbolic way of noting that there is always hope of renewal. His comments, which could point toward renewal in the Lovage marriage, link him with Chinese philosophical thought, the currency of old stories, and an understanding of nature. Overall, Wilton is a character who seems to know all, see all and offer appropriate and sometimes prophetic commentary. Therefore, it seems fitting that he solves the riddle of the frescoes. On his way out, he eyes Viola with resignation, as if he knows that her passion for her work and her actions regarding Michael's affair with Katy have moved her beyond her previous role as accommodating wife to Michael. Yet he himself has helped her to make the changes that will likely result in the dissolution of her marriage.

When Michael threatens to leave, Viola physically struggles with him to prevent his departure. In the ensuing scuffle, Jimmy throws the car keys into the brook. The stasis of Viola's and Michael's frozen relationship has been broken by the youthful energies of

Timmo and Katy, and now symbolically carried away by the flowing water. Viola relinquishes the ironic distance she has always kept between herself and Michael, and prepares herself for what she must do next. When Timmo and Katy come down from upstairs, Viola repudiates Timmo harshly, and refuses to side with him, ignoring his protestations to make her own sacrifice. During the leave-taking, Viola, Timmo and Katy stand together "as if winter had breathed its crystalline spirit into their blood and changed them too into white ice" (Warner, *Skating Party* 178). This image marks a significant moment of transition for each of them between the fairy-tale world they have inhabited during the skating party and their real lives. Each of the trio has broken a pattern of submission to Michael. Viola has rejected his ethical stance in favour of her own, Timmo has rejected his parental authority, and Katy has rejected his control over her sexuality.

Michael watches Katy doing cartwheels on the snowy lawn and sees her eyes suddenly blaze with insolence, as the young girl's did at the priest in Palau. Michael mutters "I am cured" under his breath, and tells Viola: "Spells are binding only on the consenting" (Warner, *Skating Party* 180). Here, in the third instance of this statement, he acknowledges the power of belief, which he has repudiated twice previously. His acknowledgement ends the novel. The final scene thus replays the scene between the young girl and the priests in Palau all those years ago, but in this case the young girl emerges free. Warner's stated methodological purpose, to have the past recapitulated in the present, but with a kind of redemption, is achieved.

In this novel, Warner focuses on concerns that will emerge more specifically in her 1994 Reith lectures, where her line of inquiry considers, among other issues,

"contemporary struggles for control of women and children" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* xiv). Her exploration of the Lovage family relations is amplified and extended by her mapping of the Idia mythology making its way to England, taking root there, and becoming an intrinsic part of the personal myth systems of both Michael and Viola. She illuminates the indissoluble links between mythology and sexuality, and demonstrates that those links exist in mythological systems of very different cultures. With the inclusion of the Greek tale of Phoinix in the frescoes, Warner interweaves the mythologies of three different cultures and three different time periods, to demonstrate the ways in which mythologies are always current, and always relevant, no matter how foreign or "old-fashioned" they may seem. The argument that Katy makes regarding the relevance of classical studies in modern times is really an argument made by the entire novel, and also by *Dark Wood*.

Mapping Diaspora: America and the Caribbean

> [I]f it is impossible today for anyone to feel innocent, if in whatever we do or say we can discover a hidden motive–that of a white man, or a male, or the possessor of a certain income, or a member of a given economic system, or a sufferer from a certain neurosis–this should not induce in us either a universal sense of guilt or an attitude of universal accusation.
>
> Italo Calvino

Marina Warner's third and fourth novels clearly demonstrate the process of her historical research leading her to myth that she discusses in her 1994 Reith lectures. In *The Lost Father* and *Indigo*, Warner explores not only family myths, but many cultural and political myths of her own time and the distant past through her research into her family history. In these texts, Warner moves into a clearer focus on diaspora, and concurs with Italo Calvino's sentiments when she discusses the political import of Derek Walcott's poetry:

> There's no safe place from the injuries of history; home as a place or a time of innocence can only be an illusion. But the poet [Derek Walcott] doesn't recover the bitter past to serve present grudges - his acts of remembering, his quest for identity are grounded in generosity.
>
> And from this sense at once of loss and recovery, this mix and merging, this reckoning with the complexities of the past, present national identity and patterns of belonging can be fruitfully formed. . . . No home is an island; no homegrown culture can thrive in permanent quarantine. We're

all wayfarers and we make our destinations as we go (Warner, *Managing Monsters* 94).

She also addresses notions of history in her closing plenary address to the Charter 88 Independent 1991 Constitutional Convention, *Imagining a Democratic Culture*. Here, she urges moving towards a multi-vocal, democratic culture, but one that is "not made up of national ethnic islets of separate identities, that hark back to distinct histories, determined by appeal to former geographies, languages, religion and customs" (Warner, *Imagining*). She argues that clinging to tradition can deny cultural otherness and refuse to allow the development of difference. Warner also calls for writers and artists, using Tom Paulin, Elizabeth Bishop, and George Lamming as examples, to "set aside the baggage of colonial and imperialist complacency, and evolve instead a vocabulary of transience, fragility, impermanence, which pays proper tribute to the disappeared ones who were as much a part of history and culture as the names carved in stone on the monuments" (Warner, *Imagining*). Acknowledging that such stance is utopian, Warner still considers it an important task on the part of artists and writers to put these kinds of visions into the political process.

Warner's visions of a democratic culture are directly applicable to her third and fourth novels: *The Lost Father* (1988), and *Indigo* (1992); both texts deal with diaspora and displacement, and notions of roots and homelands. These novels differ significantly from her first two fictional works, in that they are rooted in her family histories: "I quarried my own family story, my antecedents, my social background, my education" ("Rich Pickings" 30). Here, the questions Warner asks are often directed at herself: her

own political stance, how she does her historical research, and how she tells stories. Warner explains the connection between story-telling and history in an interview with Chantal Zabus:

> [T]here is a cultivating of common history through story-telling and the exchange of ideas which does cut across borders and frontiers while maintaining differences, because of course, all stories are told with local variations. In a way the story is a site of both particularity and a medium to universal experience and a sort of universal communicability (Zabus, "Spinning" 520)

The stories Warner tells in *The Lost Father* and *Indigo* exemplify the ideas that she has outlined above, for although they speak to specific family experiences, they also address universal themes. They present very detailed historical information, while offering very different perspectives from those appearing in most traditional historical records. Moreover, because her impetus for writing the books was personal as well as political, Warner's fictionalised family histories render the category of history even more nuanced, allowing for yet more speculation about what history is, and what functions it performs. Most importantly, they demonstrate the impossibility of separating the seemingly disparate categories of myth and history.

Warner maps myths in these books as she did in her first two novels, following the migrations of her mother's family between Italy and America, and her father's family between England and the Caribbean. *The Lost Father* and *Indigo* show familial, cultural, and political myths travelling across oceans and back again, always mutating in transit, like

the rhizomes described by Deleuze and Guattari. The mythmapping Warner does in these novels is very different from that in her first two, where she set cultural myths against each other with the explicit purpose of examining the myths of her own culture, particularly those involving the Roman Catholic Church.[1] Her decision to explore the myths arising from her own family stories stemmed from having sufficiently worked through her own problems with Roman Catholicism, and, even more importantly, the impact of her father's death. He died shortly after the publication of *The Skating Party*, and Warner deeply regretted never asking him about his life and ancestry. She resolved to take the opportunity to work very closely with her mother to research her maternal family history, particularly the family myth of a duel which her grandfather allegedly fought in Italy during his youth. The mythic duel became the core of her novel *The Lost Father*; the nature of the story almost necessitates both the complex structure of the book and its title. The more Warner investigates the story, the more complicated and ephemeral the myth of the duel becomes, and the further her grandfather disappears into the impenetrable mists of the past.

Roberto Calasso's image of the mythical gesture as a breaking wave, leaving unresolvable complications in its wake which reassemble into the next mythical gesture, is particularly pertinent to the Terzulli family myth of the duel which allegedly took place in 1912. Equally relevant are the differences between written and oral stories discussed by

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[1] Warner explained this dynamic, and her reasons for writing her fictional account of her grandfather's life in an interview with the author, 14 November 2000.

classicist Jane Cahill in her very thought-provoking book *Her Kind*.[2] Oral stories change each time they are told, even if related by the same teller, according to the needs of the storyteller and the (real or perceived) needs of the audience. We have forgotten, states Cahill, that the written myths we know are the texts from the end of a lengthy tradition, rather than its entirety, and much is missing. Cahill also stresses that oral stories change for many reasons, as changes are inserted to reflect current customs, beliefs, and values:

> A story also changes because there is no reason for it *not* to change. A story is not a play wherein the lines have to be the same every time it is performed so that the actors don't lose their places. A story is not bound by ownership of texts and rules about accurate quotation. The spoken word is free–winged, as Homer said.
>
> What all this means is that there are many versions of a single story. Each one is the truth because it contains the essence of the truth. There are then many truths. It depends who is speaking and who is listening (Cahill 3).

Cahill notes that the Greek myths are men's stories, with female characters defined in men's terms, as Warner's character Paula bitterly stated in her first novel, *In a Dark Wood*. Therefore, Cahill (who is also an oral storyteller) rewrites some of these myths from a woman's perspective, attempting to answer the following question: "Is it possible

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[2] In *Her Kind: Stories of Women from Greek Mythology* (Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview, 1997), Jane Cahill retells well-known stories from Greek mythology from the perspectives of the women involved. Her stories offer very different interpretations of the myths than the traditional, male-oriented, versions that have had such strong effects on male-female relations in western European culture.

to produce a version of this story that would have made sense to Greek women?" (Cahill 13). Her process of what she terms a feminist reclaiming, retelling, and appropriating is similar to Warner's political purpose in her book on fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde*. There, Warner comments that storytelling can function as a social binding agent, and notes the historical struggles between different social groups to control who tells stories. She urges more attention to the world of fantasy, where we can imagine "the possibility of a utopia" (Warner, *Beast* 418). All of Calasso's, Cahill's, and Warner's insights around myths and oral story-telling are pertinent in discussing *The Lost Father*, where the chameleon-like nature of family myth is vividly demonstrated.

The Lost Father

Marina Warner's mother came from Puglia, a region in southern Italy which becomes Ninfania in the novel. Her maiden name was Emilia Terzulli, and she was the youngest of the four Terzulli daughters to whom the book is dedicated. The epigraph to the novel is a poem about faithfulness to a mother tongue, signalling Warner's intention to focus on her mother's Italian origins, and her mother's story:

> The book is very carefully faithful to the structure and chronology of my mother's life. I wanted to use that as a kind of armature. . . . it gives you boundaries, a framework within which to explore the themes; it sets aside extraneous inventions because you have givens of the historical record" (Zabus, "Spinning" 519).

When she began researching the rise of fascism in Italy and subsequent mass emigration to America, she found that her mother's family typified the movements of most people of

their times. As they left their Italian homeland for America, returned again disillusioned, and left once more to escape the oppressions of Mussolini's regime, her family bore out the historical record of social upheavals of that time, which she wished to portray. She also states a concern to demonstrate that southern Italy, often seen as empty and steeped in poverty and cruelty, is one of the oldest parts of Europe, and has had deeply held values and strictly observed customs which bound both men and women. As always, Warner is urgently concerned with women's issues, and the book carefully delineates the lives of her mother and her sisters, even though its title marks it as her grandfather's story. To Warner, this aspect of European life is important: "It is not so much that Europe is feminine in origin; it is that half its history must have been feminine at some point and that there are both secrets and stratagems within that feminine side which we forget or ignore at our cost, our great cost" (Zabus, "Spinning" 520). Thus, although the title of the text declares that it is about Warner's Italian grandfather, it is primarily about her mother and the women in her mother's family.

In this Italian family, however, like many families of that era, the primary activities of the women's lives and the focus of their thinking was their men–fathers, husbands, sons. Thus, Warner's maternal grandfather plays a key role in her mother's story, for it was his decisions and actions that shaped her life, and that of her mother and sisters. To write an account of her mother's life, Warner needed to understand the life of the grandfather whose beliefs caused his family to emigrate to America and return again to Italy, even though he died at the young age of thirty-eight. She had certain problems writing a historical text about this family, for although she had never met her maternal

grandfather, and knew nothing of his personal thoughts, she still wanted to present him as a fully developed character in the book.[3] Warner felt that she could better recapture his past and make it live again for future generations through a fictionalised account of his early life, using materials she gained from her research into the Italy of his time, augmented by the remembrances of family members still living. More importantly, she could allow for the anomalies that were revealed as she researched the family's past, particularly those around the incident of the duel, which changed the course of their lives significantly. The more Warner delved into the family stories, the more differing versions of historical events emerged. Through fiction, Warner could present these various stories without having to decide which one(s) might constitute *the* truth of what happened so long ago. A significant result of this choice is that the book seriously questions the very discipline of history itself, and clearly demonstrates that any historical record implies strategic choices on the part of the person doing the recording and/or passing on information.

José Saramago addresses the same question of the interrelation between history and fiction in his novel *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. His narrator, a proofreader in a distinguished publishing house, arbitrarily inserts a word into a historical text that changes history utterly (including the future course of his personal life):

> He holds his biro with a steady hand and adds a word to the page, a word the historian never wrote, that for the sake of historical truth he could never have brought himself to write, the word *Not*, and what the book now

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[3] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

> says is that the crusaders will *Not* help the Portuguese to conquer Lisbon, thus it is written and has come to be accepted as true, although different, what we would call false has come to prevail over that we would call true, falsehood has replaced the truth, and someone would have to narrate the history anew, and how (Saramago 40).

Saramago's narrator comes up with a plausible variation of the history to fit the altered statement, and thus positions himself as a revisionist historian.

Warner adds another twist to revising accepted historical record when she inserts herself into the book in the character of narrator Anna Collouthar, a historical researcher delving into her mother's past. Warner (as Anna) urgently desires to tell the grandfather's story that has fascinated her since childhood. However, she not only fails to discover an ultimate truth or to produce a coherent historical narrative, but reveals all the messy anomalies introduced by her various informants, and, finally, seriously questions her own motives for writing the story the way she has. Thus, she not only questions the nature of historical research, but leaves the reader convinced that historical research can never uncover a consistent historical truth at all! The novel is very cleverly conceived, and was the first of Warner's novels to receive significant critical recognition. It was the Regional Winner for Eurasia in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, won a PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Award, and was short-listed for the Booker Prize. It was also translated into five languages.

Warner's intricately woven tapestry of a novel is divided into three sections, entitled 'Rosa', 'Fantina', and 'Anna'. These are the fictional names of her grandfather's

sister, his daughter, and his granddaughter, the three women in his family through whose eyes she will tell the story of her fictional grandfather, Davide Pittagora. 'Rosa', the novel's first section, focuses on Davide's sister Rosalba, whose emerging awareness of her adolescent sexuality precipitates the crisis of the book. This section, by far the lengthiest in the book, primarily consists of *The Duel*, the draft of Anna's novel about her grandfather, in which the action takes place from 1909 to 1912. Brief stories describing the May day when Davide suffered a fatal stroke in 1931, also appear among the chapters of *The Duel*. Davide died three days after his thrombosis without ever regaining consciousness, and his daughter, Anna's mother Fantina, was eight years old at the time. Two segments of Davide's personal diary are also contained in this section, describing how he sailed for America with his wife and infant son in 1913. The second (and briefer) section of the novel, 'Fantina', relates the story of Davide's daughters, with a particular focus on Fantina, from the time of Davide's death until they all marry. A last segment of Davide's diary, set in New York, occurs in this section to describe the serious problems he experienced adjusting to life in America. The novel's third (and by far the briefest) section, 'Anna', takes place in the present (1985), when Anna explains how she completes her research into Davide's story and experiences a family reunion in California with her mother and all her sisters present. Two brief interludes from 1985 also occur at the beginning of the first section of the book.

If the structure of the book sounds complicated, it is exactly that. Reviewer Ann Cornelisen states: "Occasionally, the zigzags in time and place leave the reader playing literary blindman's buff" (Cornelisen 26). This deliberate lack of coherence, however,

works very well to reflect the workings of memory, where the present revisits and recasts the past, continually reinventing it to fit current circumstances. Geographical fluctuations augment the temporal ones, as family members leave Italy and emigrate to America in search of a better life, experience poverty and discrimination, and return to Italy, then emigrate again in an effort to escape the oppressions of Mussolini's fascist regime. Somehow, Warner must weave all these movements through time and space into a single narrative. She accomplishes this in large measure by mapping the myths that her grandfather and the women in his life lived by: the old stories, the cultural customs, and the myths that circulated in the family about its own past.

After a brief introduction to Anna and Fantina, the seeker and repository of memories, the narrative of Davide's death, *The Snail Hunt*, begins. It is significant to the overall theme of the book, as well as an introduction to Davide, the 'lost father', for Anna must wind herself into the snail shell of her grandfather's past, down the spirals of family memories, to winkle out the hidden secrets in the depths. Snails, as described by Fantina and her sisters, are a metaphor for the myths Davide tenaciously clings to all his life, and the myths that the women in Davide's family weave around him. "They're born with their houses on their backs and they die if they're forced to leave them," says Lucia, "they pull their little door tight shut, and you can't poke them out, not even with a needle" (Warner, *Lost Father* 155). Just as Anna questions her own cruelty toward snails in London, (she has taught her son Nicholas how to kill them when he finds them in the garden) she wonders if her grandfather Davide might have preferred her to let family memories dissolve into the long-ago and far-away; "he might have preferred that I should keep quiet

about it now" (Warner, *Lost Father* 137). There are no moral certainties in the book, only a kaleidoscopic contemplation of family myths.

Davide's personal myth system was, as his daughter Fantina describes her father himself: "old-fashioned . . . my father liked music, and clothes, and good manners" (Warner, *Lost Father* 275). Davide was very conscious of his people's descent from Iapyx, son of Daedalus, who came to Ninfania and prospered. Iapyx was a hard worker, unlike his adventurous but unfortunate brother Icarus, who dared too much and died for it.[4] Davide believed in these myths of origin, and ascribed to Daedalian ancestry the native talents of his homeland - handiness, wit, and hard work: "The antiquity of the land where he was born gave Davide intense pleasure, it expanded the stretch of his memory far beyond the circumscribed round of his life" (Warner, *Lost Father* 71). He took pride in his name, Pittagora, which denoted his descent from the Greek philosopher, golden-thighed Pythagoras, and searched eagerly for the occasional remnant of the past that turned up during ploughing. Davide was particularly attached to a lucky coin that he found, imprinted on both sides independently, with two different dies, so that it was both a seal and a medal, and had "two faces that were neither mirror images of one another, nor replicas, but a false double, an inexact repeat" (Warner, *Lost Father* 73).

However, Davide's belief in ancient myths did not extend to a belief in Fate and other myths that he considered superstitious fearfulness: "It fell to the women to surround the family with barriers against harm, to keep a thorough observance of the laws of luck:

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[4] Icarus had wings constructed of wax and feathers, but did not heed his father's warnings not to fly near the sun. The wings melted, and Icarus fell to his death in the sea named after him.

never to talk of death was the cardinal rule, let alone sing about it. There were lesser rules not to be ignored either" (Warner, *Lost Father* 11). Davide scorns the fears of his wife and mother and sings an operatic farewell to life (on the day he is to suffer a fatal stroke!). It was for women to ensure that rules were followed: spider's and their webs left unharmed; hats never laid on a bed; prayers said if an owl cried during daylight hours; and so on. For women, Fate must be distracted; death and happiness must not be mentioned; and offerings, sacrifices and penances must be made to Madonnas and other saints. Davide is at once more orthodox and more sceptical: "his Jesus was loving, just and conscious, not a wild black thing let loose like a Greek *moira* in human lives" (Warner, *Lost Father* 12). He shared a view of priests common among men of his region: with their dresses, lace, and hats, they resembled women because they lacked women in their lives, and were often morally degenerate, corrupt, lazy, greedy, and treacherous. He could not imagine ever allowing his own son to study for the priesthood.

Curiously, however, along with a certain disrespect for women's beliefs and what he terms their "superstitions," Davide held a deep reverence for women. He was convinced that "you can only measure a man's value by his women, you can only appraise a country through its women" (Warner, *Lost Father* 137). In Davide's southern region of Italy, a women was worth any number of battles, and a woman's value ten times more than that of a man. A man's duty was to protect the women in his family until they are married. Moreover, Davide longed to resemble women in their spiritual aspects, writing to his wife in his diary: "In your souls, you are more true to the soul itself - we men are beasts beside you" (Warner, *Lost Father* 166). This was a corner-stone of Davide's

personal myth system, and it was derived from opera as well as Greek myth. Davide was not only a provincial lawyer, he was also an amateur singer and performer, a baritone who preferred to sing the tenor arias of love, lament, and promise. Davide was in many ways a patriarchal gallant, whose desire was to behave like an archetypal male, providing for, and protecting, his women.

Anna's novel *The Duel* contrasts Davide Pittagora's personal myth system with that of his friend Tommaso Talvi from the time they were school friends in 1909. They were both uncommonly tall for among the boys of the region, but there the similarities ended. Tommaso's family had moved from the north of Italy, and he was considered an outsider in the Ninfanian village. Uncouth, and unaccustomed to southern notions of obedience and good conduct, he evoked feelings of fear and repugnance in others. However, his sexual precociousness fascinated the shyer and more fastidious Davide, when the latter revealed all his naive dreams of love to his scoffing friend. Warner uses art to intensify the differences between the two boys regarding their personal beliefs, particularly about women. Tommaso has heard the village men talking of a buried villa recently unearthed with friezes on its walls depicting women in various poses of sexual intercourse with each other and with various animals. He took Davide to see the underground rooms (here Warner describes the artwork in the Villa of Mysteries in Pompeii for her fictional purposes). While Tommaso was sexually aroused by the orgiastic scenes, Davide was overcome with claustrophobia and could not bear to stay underground. He never saw the gigantic phallus that the women allegedly worshipped, which formed the focal point of the artwork, and he was aghast at the thought of his

mother and sisters in poses of ecstasy having sexual intercourse with animals. Davide's images of women were those of his family members serving and working, cleaning and caring for the people and animals on the farm, and thinking of them in sexual postures evoked simultaneous feelings of arousal, horror, fear, and pleasure for him. Davide heard the old men of the village speak approvingly of the phallus worship, and voice their agreement that "a woman with a healthy appetite was a treat from heaven. As long as she was under control" (Warner, *Lost Father* 28). He felt estranged from the suspicions and lewd attitudes of Tommaso and these men, and did not believe that women left to their own devices always wreak havoc and promote the devil's work. However, his personal myth system, like that of Gabriel in *Dark Wood*, produced conflicts within Davide. His chivalrous idea of manhood demanded that he be steadfast to his friend, rather than fickle like a woman, in spite of his growing distaste for Tommaso's companionship. He pitied his friend for his lack of cultural advantages and a life in a generous, loving family like Davide's. Tommaso's parents, begrudging him everything, had also refused to pay for his release from army service. Thus, the basis of the duel between Davide and Tommaso had its beginnings in their differing personal myth systems long before their confrontation ever took place.

When Tommaso went off to become a soldier, leaving the village he despised, David left to study law in nearby Riba, and the differences between their personal myth systems widened still further. Tommaso, more sexually experienced and even more cynical about women, sneered at Davide's old-fashioned chivalry, while Davide became simultaneously envious and angry. At a Pittagora Easter Sunday dinner, which Tommaso

and his family attended, Davide found himself relegated to a womanly silence, while the men, Tommaso included, discussed political issues. Unengaged in the debate, Davide noticed how Tommaso was attracted to his youngest sister Cati, and how his other sister Rosalba, experiencing the pangs of adolescent sexuality, yearned fruitlessly for Tommaso's attention. The dynamics between Cati, Rosalba, and Tommaso began to cause local gossip. In the summer of 1912, Tommaso was home on leave, and Davide, home for the summer, overheard Tommaso bragging that he had enjoyed sexual relations with Davide's sisters: "When you've been to a woman in Naples, aaah, you don't rate the local talent any more" (Warner, *Lost Father* 132). The die has been cast. Davide must follow the rules of family honour and call Tommaso a liar. According to the law of the *mentita*, Tommaso in turn must challenge Davide. As he had not hit Tommaso, Davide had the choice of weapons, and they fought with the Pittagora family pistols in the quarry outside the town, with witnesses from the café present. Not wishing to inflict life-threatening damage, and accustomed to practising with the pistols over many years, they both shot wild, but Tommaso's bullet ricocheted and lodged in Davide's temple. Davide was triumphant:

> He - Davide Pittagora, tongue-tied, indecisive, and withdrawn - had managed to speak out; he heard singing, and the singing was not only the bloodlet from his skull but a wild chorus, giving voice to his joy.
>
> He'd declared his sisters his own, now; everyone would know they had to reckon with a champion. For that he'd fall and fall again till his last breath (Warner, *Lost Father* 137).

Tommaso disappeared from the pages of Anna's novel into army life, ending up as one of the dead whose bodies were never recovered after World War Two. Davide's notion of honour had been satisfied. The narrator Anna discovered that over time duelling had become an end in itself, with the outcome irrelevant. Davide had only to fight to clear his family's name, and the more serious the resulting injury to either party, the more effectively the original injury was obliterated. Anna explained to her mother: "By duelling *à outrance*, your father wiped the slate clean: today, nobody remembers what the slander was in the first place. You don't: I'm still trying to piece it together from your scraps of memory (Warner, *Lost Father* 137). Here, Anna wondered for the first time if Davide might have preferred that she keep quiet about it now.

From the point in time when the duel takes place, however, the sustaining myths of Davide's life were at odds with those among whom he found himself trying to eke out an existence. Loathing the political situation in Italy, he left in 1913 for America before finishing his law degrees. With no money save his wife's dowry, he thought that he could provide a living for his wife and infant son in the land of plenty, but his lucky coin did not help him to find fortune in the golden land of opportunity as some of his cousins had done. He had to sing to make money on board ship, and when his son Pericle died en route to New York his cousin Sandro had to play cards for enough money to arrange a proper burial. Davide's belief in a benevolent and caring God vanished abruptly:

> I will never again think indulgently of the divine ruler and bear the evils he allows to roam the earth without complaint. I'll not humour his ministers or his followers - except the women, they feel these matters differently - for if

> there is a God he is a brute, a bully, with a mailed fist to crush the
> blameless, and that limp bleeding thing they hang up in the churches
> nothing but a lie to mask his cruelties. Does he know, can he really know,
> of our human sufferings (Warner, *Lost Father* 168).

Life worsened after they reached America. Davide's health and legal training made him entirely unsuitable for the well-remunerated manual labour many of his countrymen undertook, and he found that Italian immigrants were despised members of society. He wrote letters back to Italy on the behalf of others for less than subsistence wages, while his wife Maria Filippa sewed at a machine in a flag factory. The headaches which had plagued him since the duel worsened with the fast pace of life and the harsh climate, and he felt even more of a failure when he found that his wife and sisters were more adapted to survival in a strange land than he. Suffering extreme misery in America, Davide could not keep to 'the old ways' and could not adapt to the new. He returned to Ninfania in 1921, and his wife and children followed, but even back in his homeland he felt disoriented. Moreover, the rise of Mussolini and Italian fascism had changed the cultural landscape. His lucky coin, the emblem that signified the past bounty of Ninfania, could only be an after-image, not the reality. Similarly, Davide's life after his return from America was only an after-image of the life he had before he emigrated: "Now he'd lost that sense of fitting the rubrics which his kin and his province drew up for the proper conduct of a man like himself. . . . the signposts were all in place and legible, yet he could not get his bearings" (Warner, *Lost Father* 120). Davide's personal myth system, like those of Gabriel, Jerome, and Michael, has failed him.

Notwithstanding his shortcomings, Davide's wife, and daughters enshrined him from the time of his death, and their most effective strategy was to blur the realities of his life. They all distanced themselves from his weaknesses, and the evidences of infringements on his paternal authority and circumventions of his power that emerged from the pages of his writings. Consequently, the diligent reading of his diaries tapered off rather quickly, and the first person to read through the entire collection was his grand-daughter, many years later. His wife Maria Filippa brought up her daughters according to her notion of his paternal authority, but that authority was much easier to portray without the reality of Davide present. Without him there to mar her portrait of his saintliness, his wife could eulogise him and use him to control the behaviour of her daughters:

> Your Papà, now, he was too good for this world, that was the trouble. He was too innocent - he wanted everything to be perfect. . . . We must always remember his high standards of conduct - he was a rare spirit, and we should honour his memory. By never departing from his wishes" (Warner, *Lost Father* 191).

Maria Filippa was careful not to mention the strategies that she and her sisters devised, even when Davide was alive, to survive their extreme poverty in America. These activities tell a very different story than her eulogies of Davide, and demonstrate her own deep-seated beliefs, which ran counter to his. Davide found the women in America too strong: "The women knew too much; they weren't protected from ugliness and squalor" (Warner, *Lost Father* 118). His own wife and sisters, exposed to the ugliness and squalor of poverty, were also strong, displayed an aptitude for living that eluded Davide, despite

all his efforts to restrict them to what he considered proper conduct. Their personal myth systems, based as they were on religious belief and what Davide saw as superstitious propitiation of Fate and the gods, were also firmly grounded in beliefs around commitments to their families that dictated distinctly practical approaches, quite different from those of Davide's traditional codes of chivalry. In short, these women would do whatever it took to ensure that their families were housed, fed and clothed, whereas Davide would have them keep up the pretence that he was their protector who would provide for them. Davide's sister Rosa, for whom he had no use, was the first to abandon piecework sewing in favour of scavenging for surplus food at the hotels, and she taught Maria Filippa to do the same. The family benefited from the healthy diet these hotel leavings provided, and Davide's wife also pragmatically supplemented his meagre income by gathering the flowers from the waste-bins and teaching her daughters to be irresistible little flower-sellers. Davide was outraged, forbidding these activities, but she continued them in secret. Moreover, Maria Filippa also chose to remain in America after he left to return to Ninfania, wanting their fourth and last child to have American citizenship like the others. However, feeling that she was betraying her husband, she finally did leave the United States and take her children to join Davide in Ninfania before Fantina's birth. From that time on, Maria Filippa longed to return to America.

After Davide's death, political tensions between Mussolini and the United States resulted in a Closed Door policy banning immigration from Italy, so Maria Filippa had to struggle for her family's survival in fascist Italy. Her daughters all later professed strongly to Anna that Maria Pia had done very well to get them all through what were truly

'terrible times'. When Davide's younger brother Franco brought political disgrace upon the family by staging a subversive opera, *The Queen of Sheba's Legs*, Maria Filippa was equal to the crisis. She conjured up the icon of the Virgin Mary that hung above her bed, and simultaneously planned the most practical strategies for dealing with the imminent danger of accusations and arrests:

> Maria Filippa's eldest daughters made way for their mother to give Franco the protection of her presence at his side. Small, black, in her cloche hat and strap shoes with her handbag over her arm, she fell in beside him and took his elbow. Terror sat on her, a bat-winged harpy on her back, but she knew not to let her know she felt her grip . . . (Warner, *Lost Father* 233).

Thus, from the depths of her personal myth system, Maria Filippa drew the strength to guide her family home to safety, relying on what proved to be a very effective mixture of supplications to the Virgin Mary and practical plans. They would hide in deeper seclusion, she decided, and from the small hoard of dollars she had left from America, Franco would have some to bribe the Chief Superintendent to overlook his opera's supposed affront to Mussolini's fascist regime. So they hid, like snails in their shells, as Davide had hidden after his ignominious return from America. Moreover, Maria Filippa understood that to ensure her daughters' well-being they must marry outsiders and go with them to their countries of origin, far from the brutalities and devastation brought upon Italy by World War II. The three eldest married Americans (Imma's first Italian husband was killed in the war), and the youngest, Fantina, married an Englishman. Thus, Maria Filippa was able to carry out her dream of returning to America many years later, to join her married

daughters and live with them in California. Her oldest daughter, Imma, tells Anna that it is important to acknowledge her grandmother's skills and contributions to the family history. All of her sisters concur with Imma's sentiments:

> She wasn't a brilliant woman, she didn't go to school . . . but she always kept us nice, and did everything she could, and we always had enough to eat and we were always pretty. People wanted to know us because we were lively and pretty, and we could be like that on account of Mamma. And Mamma only. There was no one else. After Papà died. She did it all by herself (Warner, *Lost Father* 257).

Thus, Warner continues a theme that began in a small way in her first novel: it is women who organise family life, and they have their own effective ways of doing so. Moreover, the myths that guide them are just as strong as those that guide the lives of men. In this novel, this theme grows to the extent that it takes over the story of Warner's maternal grandfather. Davide emerged from a very patriarchal culture with myths that supported him as a patriarch and head of the family; his wife also believed in these cultural myths and upheld his authority, even in the face of his weaknesses and problems. However, the hardships they experience through his personal failures and his death, augmented by the political upheavals of fascism and eventual war, cause the women of his family to abandon Davide's beliefs and rely on their own. Davide believed that beauty is made, and not found:

> Beauty does not lie in our path . . . it is up to us to make it, to find the harmonious balance, and the pleasant story. And it is hard work. An aria

> should sound exactly as the word describes, as light and inevitable as the air itself; but to achieve that! No, happenstance will never make for beauty. He shook his head and resolved, reality will never do (Warner, *Lost Father* 75).

But it is the women in the novel whom we actually see practising what he preaches, and the difference between Davide and these women is their belief that reality *is* beauty. The real, the tangible–food, flowers, clothing, relationships–the things that nourish and make life possible are the endless and important concerns of the women in Davide's life, and they ceaselessly create a kind of beauty that does not even cross Davide's mind. They, in fact, do the hard work that has to be done to create the beauty that he can only dream of, as they pass on the lessons in how to deal with all the artefacts and rituals of life that enable people to carry on, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Davide's grand-daughter Anna learns all of these truths from her mother and her aunts, discovering much less about her grandfather than her matriarchal heritage. However, she must consider her contribution to the transmission of the family story, like the proof-reader in José Saramago's novel. An important key to the novel's intricacies lies in her name. Warner explains that 'Anna Collouthar' is a play on the grammatical term 'anacoluthia', a Greek and Latin derivative meaning 'a want of grammatical sequence; the passing to a new construction before the original one is completed' (OED).[5] Her name thus signals that Anna is not going to do a coherent job. The details of her findings are not, ultimately, going to make sense; she will not succeed in constructing a linear historical

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[5] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

narrative. Employed by the Museum of Albion as its Curator of Ephemera to catalogue book trade spin-offs–cereal-package offers of stickers or games, flyers, fast-food containers, and so on–her work preserves what most people would consider trash. Anna presents herself as a very self-mocking heroine, almost determined to put herself beyond a reader's criticisms by offering them all herself. Her marriage has failed, and she expects to lose her job through funding cuts. There is not much to recommend Anna except her dedication to pursue her research into her family's history. She learns that in her grandfather's era in Italy people saved and reused everything, even "the feather of a bird or the peel of a fruit or the seed from a melon" (Warner, *Lost Father* 91). She contrasts past frugalities with modern-day life, where people throw away incredible heaps of refuse. Anna also compares the attitudes her grandparents held about marriage and her own relationship with her former husband. Through her research into her mother's family past, Anna begins to make sense of her own life, which seems to her to lack a sense of coherence.

But even here, Anna is confronted by failure, for the findings of her research will be as ephemeral as the objects she catalogues so assiduously. Rather than relate an operatic family romance with her grandfather as the gallant hero, she has to relate that although there is much to respect about her grandfather and his chivalrous ways, it was through the women that the family survived and even came to prosper. Anna does not accept her new knowledge gracefully, and a second duel that carries on throughout the novel is the tug-of-war between Anna and her mother over the interpretation of their family history. Anna has read all Davide's diaries, retrieved information from all the living

family relatives, and dutifully researched the history of the region of Italy where the family originated. She is the academic expert. However, examining all of her evidence, she still does not know which version of the story might be closest to past reality. When further investigations through letters and finally a newspaper clipping add the finishing frustrating complications for Anna, her mother looks at her confusion and distress with equanimity: "You take things too seriously. You always have done, it's your nature, so I suppose we can't change it. But it's an old story. Old stories change, you know" (Warner, *Lost Father* 274).

Not only is Fantina unconcerned with finding the truth of the myth, she complicates the mysteries still further by commenting that Davide could possibly have been a fascist sympathiser. Anna had never considered this startling possibility and is shocked. Maria Filippa certainly had her doubts about Mussolini, but would have been terrified to voice them, and Anna's mother Fantina had believed in Mussolini, even in the mid-1930s. Anna realises that there is no hard evidence to support any version of the duel story now; it has truly entered the realm of myth.

Disillusioned with herself, Anna does not like her probable reasons for relating the story as she has: "God, I've been trying to write a memoir, based on *fact*, not a teen romance" (Warner, *Lost Father* 274). However, her mother has more wisdom: "love and jealousy, they don't change that much. In the final count, when you look back you remember those things . . .. It's the people you loved you remember" (Warner, *Lost Father* 276). Still rebellious, Anna wishes that her life were made up of things she considers important, like justice, education, and sexual equality, rather than love ties.

Finally, however, she has to confess to herself that it is the loves in her life that she will remember. She also has to admit to the needs of her own personal myth system, her own need to have a family story to believe in: "I had to find a story of my own. I had to be able to give my account of the world . . . Being with you sisters together, reunited so seldom in the course of forty years, infantilised me so thoroughly that I was all at once able to realise my state. I was robbed of the ability to speak up and say my piece and give my view" (Warner, *Lost Father* 263-4).

Fortunately, author Warner can compromise where her narrator Anna cannot, and find a manner of story-telling that allows her to have it both ways. Her narrative strategies have left her free to tell the story of the duel, yet also to add all the historical complexities that make history, and this particular family story, more complex and more fascinating. Warner can voice Anna's ultimate question without having to answer it: "Would Davide, my Italian grandfather, have appreciated this migration of race memory, of the spirit of the southern patriarch into the voice of the English granddaughter? He was so lost, I wanted to fill up the emptiness. And yet I wonder, would he have preferred silence?" (Warner, *Lost Father* 192). Davide does, in a sense, achieve a kind of silence, for the existing records and family memories produce a less coherent "story" of what happened long ago than the family myth that has been passed on over two generations. Anna's mother is wise when she reminds Anna that people cannot control old stories: "You're not in the driver's seat where they're concerned. I'm not either. No one is. It's beyond us" (Warner, *Lost Father* 274).

Indigo; or, Mapping the Waters

Marina Warner's fourth novel is a very ambitious undertaking, telling another family story which has undergone significant changes. The book arises this time from research into her father's family history. The project introduced some significant and painful political issues for Warner, for what she discovered was the involvement of her ancestors in activities that in the twenty-first century might be termed ethnic cleansing or cultural genocide. In her first two novels, Warner examines the impact of British culture on other cultures to turn a spotlight on British culture itself. Britain is the focal point, and the narrative perspective is British. Her third novel features Italian and British narrative perspectives. All of these stem from Warner's own immediate cultural heritage through her parents. Throughout *Indigo*, the focus is a Caribbean island, and much of the narrative perspective is given to its indigenous people, both past and present. Although the story is based on events in the lives of Warner's ancestors and family members, it ranges far afield from a family history. Rather, Warner uses details from her family history to tell a tale of British colonial conquest in the Caribbean, mapping various attempts to deal with the racial complexities that emerged from that conquest and its aftermath. Her fictional setting is an island the natives called Liamuiga, and a smaller neighbouring island they called Oualie. The references to the changing names of the islands in *Indigo* reflect the turbulence of historical struggles to claim West Indian islands for various European countries, and some of the changes Warner recounts are historically accurate, such as Columbus's mapping the islands as St Thomas. In her novel, Sir Christopher Everard renamed them Everhope; a charter of the English King renamed them St Thomas (at which

time they became locally known as 'Grand-Thom' and 'Petit-Thom'); the French renamed them Enfante Béate; and, finally, they were rechristened Liamuiga and Oualie during the process of becoming independent. The island Warner uses for her setting, on which her ancestors historically landed, carries the alternate names Liamuiga and St Christopher (St Kitts) on current maps. On websites, Liamuiga is a volcanic mountain on the island of St Kitts.

The inspiration for *Indigo* was, as Warner states: "My family's Creole past, gainsaid, erased" (Warner, "Between" 203).[6] The implications in her own life and work of Warner's British imperialist ancestry were considerable, and her retelling of the story handed down to her by her family caused her political uneasiness:

> I cannot say that the Warners were Creoles as a simple statement of fact; the relations of the former plantocracy to the islands which they colonised and inhabited for nearly three hundred years make it fallacious, even opportunistic, for a descendant now to grasp the label and wear it with new pride. . . . I sometimes feel that by writing *Indigo*, the novel I set partly in the Caribbean, I was interloping on territory from which accidents of history had morally barred me. (Warner, "Between" 199).

However, in accordance with her long-time moral imperative to challenge received ideas, she felt that she could in part redress past wrongs by retelling the family history from a different perspective, giving voice to previously omitted characters and events.

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[6] Marina Warner writes about her family past in an article entitled "Between the Colonist and the Creole: Family Bonds, Family Boundaries," in Shirley Chew and Anna Rutherford, eds. *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire*, Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1993.

The story of Marina Warner's Caribbean family ancestry is very long and complex. Her ancestor Sir Thomas Warner was granted the Governorship of the Caribbean islands St Christopher's and Nevis by a charter of King Charles I in 1625. He had a mistress, a Carib known as Madame Ouvernard (who was also known as 'Mrs Warner') with whom he had numerous children, one of whom was Thomas ('Indian') Warner. Her many other progeny remain unrecorded in official genealogies and gravestones, unlike the progeny of Sir Thomas Warner's two successive British wives. Madame Ouvernard lived for many years in a carbet (native family compound) in Dominica, surrounded by her many children and their descendants. She was greatly esteemed, and a French missionary records a visit to her in 1700, when she was over 100 years old. According to colonial writings collected by Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead, 'Indian' Warner was recognised by his father, who gave him the same name as himself.[7] He did not look like a native, except for the colour of his skin and hair, and he was raised with Sir Thomas's other children. When Sir Thomas died, however, his English wife persecuted the boy (then in his adolescence), and he ended up in chains and leg irons, working in the fields with fugitive slaves. After many adventures, including a voyage to England where he appeared at Court, he became the Governor of Dominica in 1664. Thereafter, he participated in the complicated struggles between the indigenous inhabitants of the island and various colonists, principally the British and French. In 1676 he met his half-brother Philip Warner, son of one of Sir

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[7] Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead present a collection of relevant documents as "The Case of Indian Warner," a chapter in their edited anthology *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1992. Another of Peter Hulme's books that Marina Warner found helpful was *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London, Methuen 1986.

Thomas's British wives and then Governor of Antigua, to discuss peace terms. When they met on board Philip's ship, a conflict arose in which 'Indian' Warner and his delegation were killed. Alternate stories related that 'Indian' and his men were purposely rendered drunk and murdered, or that 'the Indians' had become violent before being subdued by Philip's men. Philip was subsequently transported to England and imprisoned in the Tower. He was returned to Barbados for his trial and was acquitted, but he never regained his Governorship. Editors Hulme and Whitehead note, "almost all narratives of culture contact throw up a figure who inhabited that treacherous zone 'between' cultures which, at least in the early stages of colonial history, often meant moving uncertainly between two worlds, being seen at times on both sides as a valued intermediary, sometimes as a potential traitor" (Hulme and Whitehead 89). They consider 'Indian' Warner a paradigmatic example of such a figure. Peter Hulme, a noted scholar in the field of early European contact with indigenous cultures in the Caribbean, was a most helpful consultant for *Indigo*, and is thanked in the book's Acknowledgements.

Marina Warner features another aspect of 'Indian' Warner in "Siren/Hyphen; or, The Maid Beguiled," a paper discussing founding acts of conquest in which indigenous women allegedly betray their people to help colonisers. Warner relates that a later historian describes the conflicted settlement of St Christopher's by the French and English (under Sir Thomas Warner), and mentions a Carib woman 'Barbe' (Warner's mistress) who gave information to the English about a planned ambush by indigenous inhabitants of neighbouring islands in 1625 or 1626. The English forestalled the plan by massacring the natives, keeping the most attractive women. As Warner notes: "in founding myths like the

rape of the Sabine women, the acquisition of females and the settlement of new territories are inextricably intertwined" (Warner, "Siren/Hyphen" 103). Warner argues that the figure of 'Barbe' echoes other legendary women, Pocahontas and Malinche, and that each of these women was a cipher of union that translated into a sexual bond which then translated her name and commuted her identity[8]:

> This triple exchange–of land, of body, of name–institutes a new order of power, in the case of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, the settlement of the Algonquin territories of Virginia, and, in alignment with historical precedent, in the newly annexed island of the British Caribbean in the early seventeenth century (Warner, "Siren/Hyphen" 103).

In the case of 'Barbe', her identity became merged with the historical Madame Ouvernard, and her act of treachery against her own people became attached to this 'Indian' wife of Sir Thomas Warner, despite the fact that recorded history makes absolutely no connection between the legendary figure of 'Barbe' and the real and actual historical figure Madame Ouvernard. Here, as in *The Lost Father*, historical fact and myth again become inextricably intertwined. Finally, Marina Warner proposes that 'Indian' Warner embodies the connection that Madame Ouvernard (or 'Mrs Warner) created between the Carib and the English:

> [T]he conflicts around his identity, his place of belonging, reveal the way anxiety around the issues of nationality and race grew between the first

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[8] As legend has it, Pocahontas saved John Smith from her own people on account of her love for him, and Malinche was the interpreter and consort of the explorer Cortés.

> encounter and the establishment of imperial power. In the struggle to define ever more tightly zones of inclusion and exclusion, women constantly disrupted the boundaries, offering different ways of belonging, giving a symbolic entrance to the enchanted cave of native land, offering alternative nativity stories (Warner, "Siren/Hyphen" 113).

Madame Ouvernard/Barbe and 'Indian Warner all appear fictionalised in *Indigo*. Warner commented that the figure based on 'Indian' Warner was by far the most difficult character to write, when she was representing these past events in her novel.[9]

As the story was passed down through the generations in Marina Warner's family, historical fact became even more blurred by being suppressed and altered. When her father went to Trinidad in the 1960s to sell land still owned by the Warner family, he spoke of Warner cousins and showed Marina and her sister a photograph of a cousin who was clearly not white. They were surprised, but intrigued and pleased. At that time Warner accepted her father's story that their ancestors were enlightened slave owners, and their slaves were pleased to take the same name. When she began research for *Indigo*, however, another, quite different, story emerged. The historical Warners were not only no different than most of the plantation owners who lobbied parliament against the abolitionists and even those who wanted to improve conditions for slaves, but there had been miscegenation in the family from the beginnings of its colonising efforts that had been denied ever since. Warner had wanted to call her novel "A Deeper Bite" from the Spanish proverb that she uses as an epigraph to Part I of the book; it translates as "The tongue has

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[9] Interview with author November 14, 2000.

no teeth, but a deeper bite" (Warner, *Indigo* 13). Her reason for this was to foreground the power of language, through memory and stories, "to shape experience both fallaciously and truthfully, harmfully and helpfully" (Warner, "Between" 203). I see this as Warner's greatest political strength. She does not paint an idyllic picture of victimised colonised and execrable colonist. Rather, she shows the multifaceted relations between them, in which both sides adhere to cultural myth systems differing so widely that coherent and consistent communication between them, aside from the obvious language barriers, is absolutely impossible.

Marina Warner sets out to reintroduce the silenced voices to her ancestral history by telling welll-known stories from an alternate viewpoint. The main thread in the book is the story of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, retold in a way that shifts the focus to the women and includes the perspective of the people indigenous to the tropical island. Warner adds other, modern, threads to the mix as the novel advances into the nineteenth century. She addresses American capitalist exploitation of the island for tourism, and, finally, the struggles toward self-government of the island's indigenous inhabitants amid the pressures of transnational capitalism. All of these complex historical issues are woven into a novel that swings even further across time than *The Lost Father*. Warner's myth-mapping in the book produces a most intricate web of cultural myths sweeping back and forth across centuries and trade routes, leaving trails of bodies in their wake. To add finer detail, the individual stories and personal myth systems of the islanders and those who arrive on the shores become part of the topography as well. Warner signals her focus on diaspora in her epigraph to the novel; Derek Walcott's poem and William Empson's

statement both speak of loss and fear resulting from geographical displacement. She uses a graphic image on the first page of the novel, where she introduces her heroine Miranda making a daisy chain, "and the plants stuck fast in the ground, as Miranda knew when she tried to pull them up; she liked the flowers' resistance, their taproot clinging" (Warner, *Indigo* 3). The daisies are like all the characters in the story, trying to ground their personal myth systems in the remnants of the cultures from which they have been uprooted.

Some aspects of Warner's ambitious undertaking resemble the dynamics of her earlier novels, where she at times takes her readers into the realm of fable via the arts of various storytellers. But in this case, the story is directly set in a world of fable. In an interview with Chantal Zabus, Warner explains that *Indigo* emerged from her study of fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde*. She felt such a strong impulsion to write *Indigo* that she did so before she finished her study, working out many of its ideas in fictional form. To Warner, fairy tales can offer a way to ask questions, offer alternatives, and examine daily reality. She notes Eavan Boland's conviction that a subversive grasp of private reality can assure a proper tension with public reality, and argues that fantasy as a mode of understanding can be an ingredient in survival among grim realities that appear headed in disastrous directions:

> Storytelling can act to face the objects of derision or fear and sometimes - not always - inspire tolerance and even fellow-feeling; it can realign allegiances and remap terrors. Storytellers can also break through the limits of permitted thought to challenge conventions (Warner, *Beast* 410-11).

From Warner's perspective, the art of the storyteller carries great political importance, for the storyteller can offer a very different picture of the world, an alternative view to the status quo. Fairy tales, proposes Warner, offer "another way of seeing the world, of telling an alternative story. The mythical hope they conjure actually builds a mythology in which utopian desires find their place" (Warner, *Beast* 415). In *Indigo*, Warner offers several concurrent fairy tales in a complex process where she tells stories of fantastic islands in the South Seas and fairy princesses, while at the same time trying to make the obscene sensible, and the fantastic understandable. Shakespeare's *Tempest*, first performed in 1611, tells a tale of white civilisation coming to improve life on a tropical island in accordance with British cultural myths of the time glorifying the expansion of the British Empire. The original inhabitants of the island are depicted as monstrous and uncivilised, and the European intruders bring culture and knowledge to savages. Warner's *Indigo*, in the twentieth century, shows the islands' inhabitants as more civilised than the European intruders who arrive and systematically wreak havoc. However, Warner does not simply reverse the story so that the British are the villains and the natives the heroes. She offers a very complex view of myth systems in collision that leaves the reader with a better understanding of possible scenarios that might have taken place long ago: "I did want to give voice to the ordinariness of the culture that had been crushed. I wanted to show that it was a practical, working society, not a place of voodoo magic and cannibals. . . . So that Caliban or Sycorax, his mother in the play, don't have to be seen as these horrendous, monstrous dreams of disorder and irrationality" (Dabydeen 122). There is no place or time of innocence for anyone in the book, but there is a place for hope, according

to Warner. She notes that *Indigo*, sharing the bipartite structure of all her novels, features the past recapitulated in the present, but with differences. In the 1960s, when the Everard family attempt to recolonise the Caribbean island that their ancestors had colonised centuries before, "Sycorax, who embodies the island, even though her voice is imprisoned and muffled, survives in an altered form to bring about the defeat of those plans and an almost happy ending - at least one filled with hope and reconciliation, a kind of salvation" (Warner, "Rich Pickings" 33).

Seraphine ('Feeny') Killibree, a native Caribbean woman, is the bridge from the distant past to the present. *Indigo* offers a tale of a South Sea Island like Palau in *The Skating Party*, but with the difference that Warner gives the native woman Feeny, rather than a white British male professor, the role of storyteller. Moreover, Feeny is the guide for Miranda, the heroine of the novel, reversing the Shakespearean story where the European white upper-class male, Prospero, is Miranda's guide and mentor and teacher to the native, Caliban. Feeny's stories point the way to a possible utopia for Miranda, and a counter-story to the family history she has heard all her life which centres on British male exploits and power. Here, Miranda is aligned with Warner, who remembers the family story that came down to her and her sister: "The Creole, colonial status of my father's family was never admitted as such, the Empire was something that I took for granted as belonging to us, unproblematically" (Warner, "Between" 203). Warner herself was somewhat distanced from British complacency by the fact that her mother was Italian and her early education was in French, and she was mocked at her English boarding school for her strange accent and way of speaking. Warner comments that her mother fell into an

accepted category of foreignness, which an Italian son-in-law would not have done. Italian women were considered exotic, beautiful, voluptuous, vivacious, and conscious of their feminine role with its obligations to husband and children. However, the story of her father's colonial past was different:

> "[T]he way that I was told his story, or rather not told his story, points to the edginess English Empire families felt about miscegenation, interchanges between colonised and coloniser, about the translations of one culture into another that happened even while the hierarchical blueprint denied they could" (Warner, "Between" 203).

Warner begins the story of her British grandfather with Feeny, the Everard family nurse, telling stories of the family's past to Miranda, the grand-daughter of Sir Anthony ('Ant') Everard. Feeny is privy to the stories of both the Everard family past and the stories of the island's indigenous peoples. She can therefore meld their stories together in a way that incorporates several versions of the truth, even though she can only relate what she is told, and therefore warps historical facts even as the descendants of Davide Pittagora have done, further illustrating Warner's notion that no one has control over old stories; they take on a life of their own.

Feeny's stories occur in three short episodes, with the first appearing at the start of the novel, setting the scene for Feeny's mentorship of Miranda. This initial episode contains a *mélange* of Shakespearean characters, Greek myths, and fairy tales, all carrying mythic content familiar to any British child, and it is here that Warner symbolically establishes Feeny's authority as storyteller. Miranda's grandfather Sir Anthony ('Ant')

Everard has given Feeny his own key to the enclosed private garden belonging to the London mansion block where Sir Anthony and his wife Gillian have a flat; thus, he gives her the 'keys to the kingdom' that are his by right. She has been important to Sir Anthony all his life since she, five years older than he, became his nursery maid after his mother died. She also later attended his first wife when he married. It is an unproven rumour that at one time Feeny was "a kind of first wife, an island wife, a sort of concubine" to Sir Anthony (Warner, *Indigo* 55). When he left the island after his wife's death, he took Feeny with him and she has remained with his family ever since, even though his second, much younger, wife Gillian dislikes her intensely. Most importantly, Feeny is known for a quality called *sangay*, an ability to perform tasks quickly and efficiently but without hurrying, a quality that impressed itself on Sir Anthony in his youth and became part of his character as well.

Feeny is also given the ability to transform the ordinary into the fantastic of every powerful storyteller. She habitually sits to tell stories near a marble log which is petrified wood, older than Feeny herself. Miranda has the notion that Feeny somehow has caused the wood to change to rock, as everything changes shape in her stories. Feeny's hands, the hands that have cared for Miranda in every way since she was an infant, are also a source of wonder and a kind of map to the world of fantasy:

> Seraphine's palms were mapped with darker lines as if she had steeped them in ink to bring out the pattern; the lines crisscrossed and wandered, and Miranda would have liked to puzzle out the script, for she was beginning to read. Feeny's palms were dry and hard like the paper in a

storybook, and when they handled Miranda she felt safe (Warner, *Indigo* 4).

Here, Warner signals that Feeny will be very instrumental in her project of "mapping the waters," for her description of Feeny's hands could be a description of a map delineating the ocean crossings of explorers in search of new colonies. It also situates Feeny as Miranda's guide to her family past, indicating that Feeny's mapping of family history will reveal pertinent historical facts as Feeny describes the tropical island where she was born and explains to Miranda how European sailing ships landed there long ago. She tells of her ancestors living in baskets in the trees, the abundant flora and fauna including bushes and berries that produced blue and red dyes, the innumerable fruits, flowers, and exotic living creatures like crocodiles and tiny birds. In a fairy tale portion of her convoluted stories, Feeny describes a king who wants to keep his daughter imprisoned with his golden touch, while the princess wants to be free, to get to know the native island people and hear their stories. Finally, Feeny warns Miranda that being a fairy tale princess is dangerous: "Don't let anyone know what you are, or notice you too much. Always be a secret princess, sweetheart" (Warner, *Indigo* 12).

Feeny's second featured story divides the novel into two parts: the distant past and the present time. She tells a story from her Caribbean homeland, a mythical tale of love and a sea monster, interwoven with a story from the Everard family history relating how an island woman called "Mme Verard" betrayed her own people because of her love for the seventeenth-century founder of the island Sir Christopher Everard. She tells the British version of the story, the only version that has come down to her. Warner explains in an

interview, "what is sad but part of the human condition is that Feeny tells the story of Ariel ['Mme Verard'] as she has been told it" (Zabus, "Spinning" 521). However, as Warner explains further, Feeny can teach Miranda to rethink her world, even though she cannot do that for herself because she is a colonised subject:

> In a sense she has been incorporated and colonised; she's an island that has been taken over. But at the same time, through her possibilities of rethinking her lot and distributing rewards and punishments, she stands for me as the exemplary fiction writer who can be colonized and still speak (Zabus, "Spinning" 521).

Warner likens Feeny to an African writer writing in English to address a larger audience and reinvent the experience that audience has received historically, and to Maxine Hong Kingston, who recasts Chinese myth in a new way to reach an American audience. Even though Feeny's version of the island woman's story is not correct, it can still help Miranda to effect changes in her life.

The third and last of Feeny's stories is at the end of the novel, as an epilogue, and reiterates a theme that applies to most of the characters in the novel. She is visiting Miranda's mother Astrid, hospitalised to recover from yet another bout of alcoholic excess, and tells her of Miranda's new baby, named Seraphine. Astrid is jealous that Feeny stands *in loco parentis* to Miranda now, forgetful of her own neglectful mothering. Feeny tells Astrid a story about a tigress, caught by her reflection in a mirror, and the moral of the story is the futility of finding yourself in someone else: "It always leads to heartbreak, you know, to the disappointment that cuts" (Warner, *Indigo* 402). Astrid cannot find

herself through controlling her daughter's future, any more than Sir Anthony Everard or Sycorax could, or Xanthe could in relation to her husband.

The main body of the novel portrays Feeny's homeland as contested territory, with the indigenous peoples and the would-be colonisers struggling to assert their own rights to promote life there according to their own cultural myth systems. As always (promoted in her subtitle in this instance), Warner has a map for her text. She maps the waters by dividing the book into six parts, each titled with a pair of colours, and each containing a number of chapters. The colours in the titles of each part are directly connected to the characters involved in that section of the novel, and therefore can serve to illuminate a discussion of the interrelations between the cultural and personal myth systems of these characters

Feeny's protégée Miranda, like Paula, Viola, and Anna in Warner's previous novels, must disentangle herself from the male perspective which has dominated her mythical landscape and search for her own meanings in the world. One of Warner's explicit purposes in rewriting Shakespeare's *Tempest* is to allow Miranda more agency and reformulate the mythic landscape for women:

> Shakespeare was writing the father's plot. Prospero works out the plot for his daughter. Prospero's wife is conspicuously absent. The only woman is Miranda, the others are off-scene, but also obscene (like Sycorax). So I tried to write the daughter's plot, to take the story from the other side and show how the daughter extricates herself from the father's plot (Zabus, "Spinning" 524).

The specific father's plot from which Warner seeks to extricate Miranda is the mythic background, familiar enough to be almost invisible to Miranda, that shapes her entire life. She has been brought up to believe in the superiority of the white British ruling class, to which she belongs, and in the superiority of the male gender, to which she does not. Thus, Warner has the heroine of *Indigo* taking on the infamous mythic trio–race, class, and gender– and trying to make sense of them in her life. Miranda's grandfather, Sir Anthony ('Ant') Everard, and his son, Kit Everard, are the fathers from whose plot Miranda must extricate herself.

Sir Anthony Everard is modelled on Marina Warner's grandfather Sir Pelham ('Plum') Warner.[10] However, Plum and his son, Marina Warner's father, were born on an island in the West Indies (Trinidad). Warner writes that her father and grandfather, so "thoroughly and indisputably English," would not be considered British subjects under present nationality laws (Warner, "Between" 199). Plum Warner became the England captain of cricket, then President of the MCC, achieving a stature almost equal to that of the King of England, and certainly welcome in the latter's social circles. According to her grandfather's memoirs, his earliest memories of cricket were "of batting on a marble gallery to the bowling of a black boy, who rejoiced in the name of Killibree" (Warner, "Between" 200). Warner notes that the image of Killibree (Creole patois for Hummingbird) in Plum's account was partially responsible for her reckoning with the past

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[10] Warner explained that her grandfather had a nicer temperament than Sir Anthony Everard, whose character somewhat resembles that of her ex-father-in-law, Sir Hartley Shawcross. She also noted that her sister was startled by her depiction of their father ("you can't have made Daddy a black gambler!"), but that her father did have a temper like that of Kit Everard. (Interview with author, November 14, 2000).

in *Indigo*. To her the relations of the nicknamed servant and the young master typified, in extension, the relations of coloniser and colonised: the batsman's whiteness enhanced by the marble gallery; the 'boy' infantilised by his affectionate yet patronising nickname; and, above all, "the easy confidence with which the writer, my grandfather, acknowledges his debt to his childhood trainer, that 'old world courtesy' which makes up for what it takes for itself by a show of exquisite good manners ('breeding')" (Warner, "Between" 200).

Born on the West Indian island of Enfante-Béate, Warner's character Sir Anthony is a small, light-boned man with a narrow head and grey-blue eyes set close together, affording him an extraordinarily accurate binocular vision. He lives by his maxim for life, "Keep a straight stick and a modest heart," with a nervelessness and lack of abandon that gave him incredible skill on the field and still affords him an awesome aura. In a game which mirrored the ideals of Britain, its athletes were considered patriots as well as players, and became social heroes. Among them, Sir Anthony in particular had the art of prediction, and could make his way through the finesses of the game with skill, grace and seeming effortlessness. Following Seraphine's example, he developed *sangay*, the quality that followers of the game of Flinders most acclaimed in the players that they exalted as heroes. Sir Anthony, then, has become a mythical figure himself by completely subscribing to the cultural myth of Flinders, which exemplified the myth of the superiority of the British Empire.

Warner credits C. L. R. James, in his extraordinary account *Beyond a Boundary*, for laying out the relations between the game of cricket and the power of the British

Empire.[11] At one point in his book, extolling the virtuosity of famous cricketer W. G. (William Gilbert, always known by his initials) Grace, James explains how Grace entered the realm of myth, and suggests the power that myth has on people:

> I have indicated what I think W. G. signified in the lives of the English people, not in what politicians did for them or poets wrote of them or what Carlyle and Ruskin preached to them, but in the lives that they themselves lived from day to day. We shall know more what men want and what they live by when we begin from what they do. They worshipped W. G. That is the fact. And I believe that we have never given this fact the attention it deserves. Some day we shall (James 182).

When politician Earl Attlee remarked at a Cricket Society function that for him and his fellow school-mates "cricket was a religion and W. G. stood next to the Deity" (James 165), James found his comment to exemplify a sport historian's view that the English nation gained some of its virtues from its addiction to games. James goes on to argue that the most potent force in the universe is "the spontaneous, unqualified, disinterested enthusiasm and goodwill of a whole community, and deplores the problematic perspective of social history: "historians do not begin from what people seem to want but from what they think the people ought to want" (James 184-5). James's book traces British colonial relations in the West Indies through the history of cricket up to the time that native West Indians, instead of white British men, were chosen to captain the West Indian cricket

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[11] C. L. R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*, first published in 1963 (London, Stanley Paul), was extraordinary for its insightful analysis of sport and colonial politics; the edition quoted is much later (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994).

teams, and how, finally, an acceptance of a native West Indian captain effected a relationship between West Indians and "the comity of nations" (James 261). Discussing his autobiographical journey, James refers to the same Shakespearean text that furnishes a base for Warner's novel when he notes: "To establish his own identity, Caliban, after three centuries, must himself pioneer into regions Caesar never knew" (James, Preface). Warner takes James's theorising to heart in her fictional depiction of Flinders, the game devised by the British colonists who took over the island of Liamuiga and introduced later into England, the 'home country'.

Miranda's father Kit Everard, opposite to his father in every way, never played the game of Flinders, to his father's great disappointment. He claimed a childhood foot injury prevented his taking up that sport. Instead, he became adept at poker, bridge, backgammon, and chess. What he has in common with his father is a lucky touch, but it has not carried over from games into his life. Kit is Sir Anthony's son with his first wife, the Creole Estelle Desjours, and he, like both his parents, was born on Enfante Béate. Estelle died by drowning in the waters off Oualie. It was over twenty years before Sir Anthony had his second child Xanthe by his second, English wife in London. Miranda's father Kit is said to have "a touch of the tarbrush" from his Creole mother's blood (Warner, *Indigo* 22). He has very dense, dark, curly hair, and his voice carries intonations from the island where he was raised. At school in England, where he went at 15 after his mother's death, Kit was called 'Nigger' Everard. He is almost an exact opposite of his sanguine and controlled father, always "at cross-purposes with life" (Warner, *Indigo* 33). Mercurial in temperament, given to violent outbursts of temper, he displays the opposite

of his father's British aplomb. Unlike his father, Kit is impoverished, struggling to provide for his wife and child, and his father scorns his disaster of a marriage (his wife is alcoholic and bitter in temperament) and his general inadequacies. Kit's wife Astrid yearns for more social status and therefore envies Kit's family and despises them at the same time.

Kit and his wife have tempestuous fights, and Miranda sometimes sees her parents' anger as "a fiery angel, helping her to defend the walled garden of her privacy" (Warner, *Indigo* 19). Born early, she is a child whose existence functions as a slash parting her parents, rather than a hyphen uniting them. She is the placator, the intermediary, who can sometimes defuse the anger, but largely her parents are absorbed in themselves to the point that her existence is irrelevant. They often forget her, abandon her, or leave her with her grandfather Sir Anthony. There are times when Miranda longs to live in her grandfather's orderly household rather than her father's. It is from the story of these two men–her grandfather and her father, so closely related but so differently displaying the British and the West Indian aspects of their heritage–that Miranda must forge her own story. She must devise her own personal myth system, and determine for herself the aspects of her heritage to live by.

Part I of the novel, Lilac/Pink, contrasts Miranda (Lilac) and her counterfoil Xanthe (Pink), who are relatively close in age. Although the two children were brought up as sisters, Xanthe is Miranda's aunt, for she is the daughter of Sir Anthony Everard and his second wife Gillian, while Miranda is the daughter of Sir Anthony's son Kit. Warner presents the two girls as fairy tale characters, with Miranda as a Cinderella figure, and Xanthe as the quintessential fairy tale princess, with a pink-and-white English complexion,

blue eyes, and blonde hair. Miranda is aligned with the indigenous people of the island where her grandfather and father were born. Feeny points out that Miranda's skin colour is not white: "you're kind of a high yellow, that's what we call it," and her dark hair "grows in a pigeon's nest" (Warner, *Indigo* 5, 17). The differences between the children are underlined during discussions of appropriate wishes for the baby Xanthe's christening. Her godmother, an aging British royal, asks Miranda what she would want if she were Xanthe, parodying the godmother of fairy tales who can grant three wishes. Six-year-old Miranda asks for a doll with eyes that open and close and real blonde hair, a treasure box with a lock and key, and long yellow hair with bouncy curls for herself. She also asks for a porridge pot that never gets empty, which her mother says means enough money for the housekeeping. Miranda's wishes indicate that even a six-year-old is aware of the cultural myths that surround her, and that she wants to be like Xanthe, or in fact to *be* Xanthe. To Miranda, Xanthe has everything: her father's adoration, as his youngest and most dear child, the adoring attentions of her mother, good looks, and a household that runs smoothly, where voices are not raised in anger and there is plenty of money for food. Miranda, above all: "longed to retain access to Seraphine" (Warner, *Indigo* 18). Thus, early on, Miranda yearns for a white, upper-class status and the appearance of a fairy tale princess..

Her rival Xanthe, the baby completely unconscious of the feelings she is arousing among the assembled guests at her christening, is offered a curious mixture of wishes by her relatives and her godmother. Her brother Kit, a kind man despite his volcanic temper, offers Xanthe goodness of heart and a loving nature, pity and gentleness. However, his

wife Astrid bursts into the christening party like a "half-mermaid, half-stormy petrel" (Warner, *Indigo* 57). An unwelcome guest, she emerges wet and dishevelled from the fog, wind, and rain, dressed in a black silk slip, and quite drunk. En route to the flat, Astrid has cursed the members of Kit's family: Sir Anthony is to lose all he loves; Gillian will find closed doors when she needs help; Kit will burn with love and fury against her (Astrid), and Xanthe will never find a way to enjoy what has been given to her; she will never believe that she is loved, and never trust her friends. Astrid's curses, like those of the malevolent fairy in many tales, are negated by the gifts of the fairy godmother Princess as she leaves the party. She wishes Xanthe heartlessness: "Like Baldur the Beautiful, let her repel all comers! Sticks and stones, words and deeds, let nothing touch her! We'll have her dipped in the Styx, not forgetting to put her heel in too!" (Warner, *Indigo* 61). At this point, Miranda's personal myth system consists of fairy tales, and the island stories she hears from Feeny.

When Miranda and her parents leave the christening, their distance from the fairy tale palace of Sir Anthony's flat in the mansion block is presented as significant. Going to take the subway home, they become lost in the impenetrable fog. When they find that the trains are no longer running, Kit loses his temper and is unable to help his wife and daughter who are soaked, frightened and cold. He cannot bear to return in disgrace and supplication to Sir Anthony's flat. Eventually they are rescued by a black train guard who takes them to his warm cubby-hole of a room underground. Kit calls the guard a "bloody big black fool," parading the arrogance of his upper-class status, but he cannot afford to stand on ceremony, for he desperately needs help. Their joint island heritage overcomes

the differences between the two men, and they end up swapping stories of the island and Sir Anthony's exploits on the Flinders pitch. Thus, Kit is a kind of conflicted figure, emotionally drawn to his island heritage yet taught by British culture to be ashamed of it. His personal myth system, like that of Gabriel Namier in *Dark Wood*, is a divided one, and cannot help Miranda, who takes refuge in the world of fairy tales for guidance.

Parts II and III of the book, Indigo/Blue and Orange/Red, are set in the 1600s, and outline the conflicting cultural myth systems of the people indigenous to the island (Indigo/Blue) and the British colonisers (Orange/Red). Warner notes that Shakespeare's first folio (containing *The Tempest*) was published the year that Sir Thomas Warner landed, changing the name of the island of Liamuiga to St Kitt's, the first British land holding in the West Indies. She comments that other writers have seen *The Tempest* as a drama about colonialism, but none has focused on Sycorax as a positive female figure. In rewriting Shakespeare's play in order to dramatise the historical account of her ancestor's arrival on the island, Warner takes Caliban's statement that the island is rightfully his, inherited from his mother Sycorax, and makes her a major character: "in my book, she becomes the embodiment of the island itself, of its inner life, as well as a woman of ordinary passions and skills who - I hope - grows to the dimensions of a full humanity" (Warner, "Between" 203).

The water around the island provides the first intimation of European invasion by bringing dead bodies to its shores. Twenty black corpses, men and women, wash up on the beach, bearing wounds around their necks and ankles. The islanders are mystified, but the readers know that they are slaves, thrown overboard from a passing ship. Following this

event, rumours come ashore about other black people who have landed alive on other islands through shipwrecks, mutinies, and other events. Thus the British landing occurs as one more incomprehensible disaster in a series. Warner encapsulates the misfortunes wrought by British colonisation in the West Indies in a first contact narrative from the perspective of Sycorax, and her family. She is a wise-woman skilled in the use of herbs, who learned her craft in large measure by experimenting on her three daughters until they chose to eat food made by more dependable cooks. She is also an expert in dying cloth with a dye made from indigo bushes she grows and tends. When she cut an unborn child from the womb of one of the black bodies on the shore and brought the baby into her home, Sycorax assumed a mythic status among the islanders and lived apart from her husband and family. The islanders are alternately dismayed, sceptical, and proud of her prodigious powers. Some pronounce Sycorax to be filled with sangay (preternatural sight and power), while others circulate gossip about her sexual profligacy, and rumours that she has brought a changeling child into her family. The child's advent is considered miraculous or monstrous, depending on the person's perspective who is relating the circumstances of his birth.

The black baby is the first African to arrive on the island, and she names him Dulé, meaning grief, but he comes to be known later by British settlers as Caliban. Sycorax lives with Dulé and her many animals in her own compound near the island's volcano Adesangé, where she set up her indigo dying works. There, many come to ask advice and obtain cures for all manner of ailments, psychic and physical. Later, her brother brings her another child, an Arawak girl whose father was killed and mother abducted by Europeans,

to help with her indigo works. Sycorax calls her Ariel, brings her up as a sister to Dulé, and loves her. Thus, Warner has taken these characters from Shakespeare's play and given them lives where family relations and work are the main features. However, this does not mean that they live in idyllic harmony in their island paradise, for the children are very affected by the displacement they have suffered. Dulé grows up never ceasing to long for evidence of his roots and to mourn a past he cannot remember, and finally leaves to assume his place among the men of the village. Sycorax has kept the facts about Ariel's birth from her and pretends she is her birth mother, little realising that Dulé has told Ariel of her Arawak parentage, causing Ariel to resent the subterfuge. When Ariel reaches adolescence, Sycorax cannot bear that she will leave to be with the young village women her own age. However, she agrees when Ariel wishes to live in a cabin she has constructed in the forest. Thus, Warner portrays Sycorax simultaneously as a powerful woman having mythic status among the island people, a working woman earning her livelihood by dying cloth, and a mother having problems with her adopted children.

In the midst of the tensions between Ariel and Sycorax, life changes drastically and instantaneously with the arrival of Kit Everard and his men on the island. Here, the cultural myth systems of the islanders and English (symbolised by the god of the mountain Adesangé and Kit's red hair) clash with predictable results. Warner typifies the incomprehension between them by recounting the meeting of the Britishers with Sycorax, who returns to her compound to find her animals missing, her dye works vandalised, her stores rifled, and her hive of bees buzzing furiously as they circle her cabin. The British become the cannibals they think the islanders are when they burn Sycorax's cabin with her

inside it and she falls to the ground in its ruins: "Sycorax smelled of barbecued meat and the blisters on her skin had burst where her clothes had been ripped away and her flesh showed red as raw tuna fish underneath" (Warner, *Indigo* 133). Ariel is wounded when one of Kit's men shoots her. However, in spite of the violence of their meeting, Kit Everard tries to convince himself that he comes to bring peace as he masturbates to avoid following his urge to rape Ariel. :

> I shall found a garden in these Western Isles, he swore. I've struggled to the edge of the navigable world in my *Argo* to find the golden fruits of the setting sun, and now I've found them and they're guarded by maidens. Or at least by one maiden, and she has given me battle (Warner, *Indigo* 150).

Kit goes on to imagine tending the fruit tree and making amends for his violence by baptising Ariel so that they could both be saved. He fantasises that he will cherish her and all will be healed. For him myth and reality have little connection, for he enslaves Ariel, and forces her against her will into his servitude and his bed.

Warner contrasts the British mythic combination of violence and prayer with the moral code of the supposed 'savages', as she has contrasted other cultures to the detriment of British culture in her other novels. Dulé is horrified when he comes upon the scene of destruction and finds the English asleep in the compound. However, his cultural myth system does not permit the murdering of defenceless enemies:

> If someone had suggested he should have killed them then, where they lay, and avert all the trouble that was to come, Dulé would have been astonished that such a cowardly procedure could be proposed, let alone

> seriously entertained. To attack in self-defence, as Ariel had done, was a warrior's response, justified in the heat of battle. But to dispatch a victim in the dark, while he was sleeping, was not a method of attack or survival understood by Dulé or the people among whom he had grown up (Warner, *Indigo* 155).

Dulé's reactions point out how colonial relations are influenced by cultural myth systems and codes of honour, just as personal relations were in *The Lost Father*. Thus the island becomes a colony of sugar plantations, and the colonists rich beyond anyone's imaginings. As one of them comments, "this is the original garden God forgot to close" (Warner, *Indigo* 180). Kit Everard rapes Ariel, despite his religious misgivings, and she has a son by him, Roukoubé ('Red Bear Cub'). The story of Roukoubé, according to Warner, was the story with which she began her novel, but then never wrote: "The kernel of the *Indigo* novel is really the story of Ariel; baby Roucou" (Zabus, "Spinning" 522). He is the link between the cultures, but a link that will never be acknowledged by the English. Ariel despises Kit and plans to kill him, even though she has in a strange way enjoyed the power her sexuality has over him. However, when her actions make him suspicious, Kit mounts a massacre of the natives which decimates their numbers and leaves the island at the mercy of the British. Later, he tells one of his men that Ariel warned him of a native attack; the lie that the island woman saved the Englishman because she loved him has begun its travels. Sycorax was killed in the massacre, and buried under her saman tree. Through the following centuries, the people of the island come to bring gifts, drive tacks or nails into the tree, and make wishes to the spirit that inhabits the tree. From the time of her death,

Sycorax becomes a larger mythical figure than she was in real life, and functions in the novel as a spirit of the island: "She and the island have become one; its hope come to her in the wind bending the palm fronds on the beach, making the halyards sing against the masts in the bay, in the tree frogs' piping, the rattle of the fleshy leaves of the saman. . . . The island is full of noises" (Warner, *Indigo* 213).

The remainder of the novel concerns itself with the way these historical cultural confrontations play out in the lives of twentieth-century Everard family members. Miranda and Xanthe are contrasted again in Part IV of the novel, Gold/White, but this time Miranda's personal myth system is changing, and she does not see the contrast between them as consistently showing her at a disadvantage. She is now eighteen, ostensibly studying art in Paris, but actually abandoned there by her parents who are in Monte Carlo, where Kit is (unsuccessfully) trying his luck at the gaming tables. Sir Anthony and Xanthe (Gold), both impeccably groomed and well turned out, appear at Miranda's rather run-down hotel to rescue her. Xanthe, whose father has now given her the pet name of Goldie, is now eleven. Raised with her mother's racial prejudices, she parrots them when Miranda asks her about Feeny: "Her room smells funny, like an old jar with something sticky and brown it in you can't tell what it is" (Warner, *Indigo* 234). Xanthe scorns Miranda's grubby room, contrasting it with the plush hotel where she and her father are staying, and recalls conversations between her parents which fault Kit's spendthrift ways and the fact that Sir Anthony continually has to cover his son's debts. Gillian, quite concerned about Miranda's future, worries that her "swarthy" appearance will put off prospective employers, and explains to Sir Anthony that there is a big difference being a coloured man

and a coloured woman in British society. Xanthe disapproves of Miranda as her mother would. To her, Miranda looks cheap because she never looks altogether clean, and she imagines it would be hell to be Miranda. However, this time the fairy tale princess is situated as inferior to Cinderella. As the young girls look in a mirror, Miranda compares her bushy hair and dark complexion with the radiant pink-and-gold complexion of Xanthe.

At this point in time, however, a more mature Miranda is becoming proud of her mixed blood; in Paris, difference is an asset rather than a cause for shame. "Oh, I'm an exotic to them -being a bit of a 'musty', as Feeny used to call it, isn't anything to deny here in Paris," she says proudly to her grandfather: "Everyone loves me for the very things you want me to cover up!" (Warner, *Indigo* 249). Moreover, along with smug feelings of white upper-class British superiority, Xanthe harbours envious feelings about Miranda's comparative freedom: "Xanthe's tidy existence felt mussed in Miranda's company; she experienced a sudden, vivid awareness of prohibitions hedging her about, and with the awareness, a desire to break them" (Warner, *Indigo* 246). When Sir Anthony proclaims that they are taking Miranda back to London instead of letting her show Xanthe Paris, Xanthe is icily furious, and tells her father she hates him. Miranda is gradually, in spite of envying Xanthe, turning away from the British cultural myths she was brought up with, and finding others that will allow her to feel positive about her Creole heritage.

Back in London, Miranda (White) finds out that she is not always seen as a 'musty'. She is a free-lance artist, journalist and photographer, preferring to work for alternative publications. When she interviews a French director, famous for his political films, he explains to her that money, politics, and shit are all the same, and rule our

culture. Furthermore, the essence of Art is that it is unnatural, contrived, fashioned, unrealistic, just as Shakespeare's plays were: "fiction is always much stranger than reality" (Warner, *Indigo* 262). One of three actors, Black Panthers, takes exception to her photographing him without permission. When she remonstrates with him, trying to explain and apologise, he attacks her:

> Aha, Whitey just didn't get a chance to ask. And isn't that just the case with everything you gone and done over the centuries of black oppression? You never had the change to ask - the slaves, the chain gang, the artists who got burned out making entertainment for you and looking real pretty for you, taking Whitey's junk, the white pigs' white junk. Oh baby, you're one hell of a fantastic heap of self-delusion, you say you're on my side. You bourgeois liberals - you're the pits. I'd rather have a racist straight up and on the rocks any day. You don't know shit (Warner, *Indigo* 265).

George Felix is reminiscent of Paula's brother-in-law David in *Dark Wood*, who lambasts the smug British attitudes concerning Vietnam. Miranda finds herself agreeing with his attitudes and wanting to demonstrate her own sympathy for his ideas. She longs to tell him of her Creole grandmother, her island-born father (called 'Nigger' at school, her love for Feeny, and how she is seen as a 'musty'. However, she realises that George sees her as white, and does not want her to renounce her position of privilege and affect comradeship. Here, Miranda does not feel at home with either the white or black side of her heritage, but longs to find a way to connect with the world which despises her as white.

Xanthe is no help to Miranda, for she is so steeped in the myths of white upper-

class society that she cannot see beyond them. She pays for Miranda and her father Kit to go to the island of Enfante-Béate for the three-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Sir Christopher Everard's landing there. Xanthe wants to sit on the platform with the local dignitaries, "while lots of faithful members of the Commonwealth leap about in traditional warpaint in front of them" (Warner, *Indigo* 277-8). Sir Anthony refuses to go, saying the game of Flinders, which will be played on this occasion, has changed: "There's a killer spirit in the Game now. It's foreign to its core. They're not athletes any more, they're gladiators. . . . It's not play any more. It's war" (Warner, *Indigo* 276). He refers to the fact that native islanders are now defeating the British who originally taught them, and what was once a game uniting all nations has become "the focus of all the discontent and hate and rivalry and bitterness that it used to . . . massage" (Warner, *Indigo* 326). Miranda feels uncomfortable with the idea of celebrating when she thinks of the oppressions the British institutionalised: "The slaves, the slaves. The sugar, the Indians who were there, the Indians brought there afterwards. Feeny and Feeny's parents and grandparents and . . . her daughter, the one she had to leave behind. The plantations. The leg irons and the floggings. Sugar. Sugar" (Warner, *Indigo* 278). Xanthe mocks Miranda for worrying about events that occurred three and a half centuries ago. Moreover, Xanthe has a plan. She is working with a developer, Simon ('Sy') Nebris, to establish a luxury hotel on the island. Sy, a fat man like the man in Seraphine's first story whom many consider a eunuch, lives a life entirely dedicated to pleasure, and with his help, the fairy princess will become an economic aristocrat, Cinderella is choosing another end to her fairy tale. Miranda is too embarrassed to tell Xanthe that part of her sensitivity to racial issues results from having a

sexual relationship with the Black Panther George Felix.

In Part V, Green/Khaki, cultural myth systems clash again, this time between Europeans, Americans, and some of the island's indigenous peoples, in ways that promise a kind of utopian future for the island that attempts to redress what Warner calls "Prospero's theft, that foundation act of Empire" (Warner, "Between" 203). Miranda and Xanthe are caught up in these struggles for control, and they must make choices according to their own beliefs. In the late 1960s, Miranda, Xanthe, Kit, and Sy attend the celebrations of the English landing and find the island an earthly paradise, which Sy wants to develop as soon as the island gains independence from its status as a British colony. Xanthe and Sy (who later becomes her husband) convince the Governor of the island that their proposed luxury hotel and gambling casino will benefit the islanders and the economy. Sir Berkeley Seacole is an indigenous, non-white, British-educated man deemed appropriate by the British to carry on the path that they have laid after independence. He agrees to the plan partly because Kit, a native islander, supports it as well. Sir Berkeley explains, as they watch the game of Flinders, that his young niece, Atala Seacole, is quite a different brand of politician. Educated in Britain, she holds Marxist-Leninist views and heads the opposition party of the island government. She continually berates her uncle for adhering to a status quo that upholds British superiority and disadvantages the native islanders.

Miranda and Xanthe, bored with the Flinders match, go exploring and find the sulphur spring where Sycorax held healing consultations and subsequent colonisers took restorative baths. Abandoned now, it is a site where a renegade band of islanders live in a

commune headed by a former native policeman, Jimmy Dunn. They detest the white interlopers deeming them immoral and dissolute. Miranda and Xanthe, bathing in the sulphur springs, are attacked by a group of children, and the differences between them are accentuated by their responses to the attack. Xanthe is furious, but Miranda weeps in shame and has memories of the slave trade and stories of the plantation owners forcing their female house slaves to serve them topless. The violence shown by the children toward Miranda and Xanthe is echoed in the game of Flinders, when the visiting British team is given an advantage by the referees which will mean a defeat for the islanders and a riot erupts. As Sir Berkeley states, "this is a historic stage in the game, when even we, from a small, backward place like Enfante-Béate, black people, former bondsmen, protégés, pupils, are emerging as world-class players" (Warner, *Indigo* 337). The tables are turning and Miranda is sympathetic, but Xanthe is not. One of the missiles thrown by the children was a curious piece of oystershell, carved to look like a bird in flight; Miranda keeps it and treasures it, signifying that the legacy of Sycorax continues to Miranda, even though "[i]t was common knowledge that the indigenous people who had lived on the islands during the time of first contacts had left nothing of themselves behind" (Warner, *Indigo* 338). Myths continue their travels in mysterious ways.

By the 1980s, the island has been transformed by Xanthe and Sy. It has been, in a sense, restored, but strictly for commercial purposes. The "green" of this section of the novel is Xanthe's money, and the hotel run by her and Sy is called The Spice of Life. Her father Sir Anthony, devastated by the loss of his golden princess Xanthe, wastes away and dies; Astrid's curse has been realised. A wearily cynical Kit runs the casino, but hates its

policy of allowing no natives inside. He prefers to spend time with the island natives, even though he knows they do not accept him as one of their own. The sulphur springs have been turned into a rustic massage parlour which dispenses sexual favours. There is no luxury unavailable to the hotel guests, but the islanders are strictly confined to pleasure-giving roles in the service of tourism. Xanthe's personal myth system is hedonistic, and she is clear about her aims: "The getting of pleasure! "The lineaments of gratified desire' - not love, of course, in some stupid, narrow sense" (Warner, *Indigo* 330).

However, personal and cultural myth systems are to be disrupted yet again in the Garden of Eden. The former Jimmy Dunn has adopted a Muslim name, Abdul Malik, and his renegade commune have become the a group of terrorists called Shining Purity. They stage a coup, bursting into the government chamber with machine guns to capture the Prime Minister and other government officials as hostages:

> Let's see the end of foreign putrefaction in our land. Let's see the back of the gamblers and fornicators, the followers of Satan and Belial, who flaunt themselves in the abominable bikini and pour the tainted rum punches and mint juleps down their throats of evil. Let us say to the US dollar: we don't want your filth here. Let's say to the great plastic card, no, we don't want you here; let's say to the great white god Jesus Christ we don't want you here. . . . You are the buyers and sellers in the temple. You have made over your people and your god to the prince of this world (Warner, *Indigo* 354).

Malik may have converted to the Muslim religion, but his manner of expression betrays the Biblical teachings of his European schoolteachers. European myths have been

absorbed by natives, but in ways that subvert the British political aims. As Warner says so often, old stories are not to be controlled, and some of the natives have developed a new concept of themselves, aided by the British cultural myths they have incorporated into their own culture. The lives of Sy, Xanthe, and Kit were all uprooted as severely as those of the natives at the advent of the British centuries before. Xanthe drowns as Sir Anthony's first wife did long ago. Yet another body in the water announces yet another change and another shift in mythic perception. When danger threatens, Xanthe suddenly realises that her personal myth system (as well as much of her tourist industry) has been built on a house of cards, and that she really does love and need Sy apart from his money: "Only at the very last minute, when so much was coming apart around Xanthe, did that fairy decree of long ago stop working and Xanthe Everard became vulnerable to love" (Warner, *Indigo* 373). Xanthe's death echoes that of Sycorax, who has died estranged from her daughter and never ceases to regret her selfish "want that drives love away, that makes loving a mirror in which you only see everything you want for yourself" (Warner, *Indigo* 374). The voices Sycorax hears are different after the political coup. Atala Seacole is now in power and proposes drastic changes to the way the island is governed. With statistics and down-to-earth common sense, she lays down the foundations of an island utopia. No more gambling, no more imported foods and fuels, no more foreign ownership of companies, education for the children, work other than tourism and servitude in foreign countries for the adults, and conservation for the island itself. The Béatois will now forge ahead to construct new cultural myths of their own, composed of a combination of native and British myth systems.

Such a combination will also allow Miranda to follow her quest for a place to belong, mythically speaking. Her attempts to solve the racial problems that have resulted from her family history are resolved in Part VI of the novel, Maroon/Black, where Miranda (Maroon) situates herself in the multiracial Britain of the 1980s. Her father Kit, now living at peace on the island, has become a worker raising oysters for export, now a lucrative industry for the island, and finally feels that he is one of the island's natives, "[a]s far as anyone can be said to be native at all" (Warner, *Indigo* 382). Here, Kit voices the notion that racial purity is nothing but a pipe dream, and the very concept of race itself is flawed. Mary Louis Keating argues this point in her paper "Interrogating 'Whiteness', (De)Constructing 'Race'" when she comments that concepts of race are inaccurate, and transform distinctions between people into immutable facts.[12] Keating adds that references to race perpetuate a belief in separate peoples, identities, and stereotypes, encourage polarisation into white/black (ignoring other diversities), and finally notes: "racial categories are not–and never have been–benign. Racial divisions were developed to create a hierarchy that grants privilege and power to specific groups of people while simultaneously oppressing and excluding others" (Keating 916).

Miranda finds her own way to deal with these same issues by further exploring her relationship with the actor George Felix (Black). She meets him again when she donates her skills as a free-lance artist to a programme for famine relief, health education, and skill development in South Africa. The T-shirts she designs are photographed on notable people for a catalogue advertising the programme, and when Miranda goes to give one to a well-known actor, Shaka Ifetabe, she finds her former lover George. He is playing one of his occasional theatrical roles, and

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[12] Mary Louise Keating's paper, "Interrogating 'Whiteness', (De)Constructing 'Race'" (College English 57.8 (1995): 901-18), focuses on exposing the hidden assumptions people make around racial identities.

Miranda, arriving at the rehearsal held in a church, does not recognise the figure of Caliban, with his ankles tied together, "lying in a twisted shape on the dais in the chancel, where the altar would have been" (Warner, *Indigo* 386-7). Here, Warner alludes to the twisted body of Sycorax, the tortured body of the enslaved Dulé, and the cultural myths of the British that brought about their plight. Miranda, watching, wishes that she could learn a new language that would go beyond a cursing, ranting response to oppression. She also faults herself for having the sexual fantasy that through him she could get in touch with the primitive in herself:

> I am such a fucking racist, she was thinking . . . I can't get away from it, even though I of all people shouldn't be. Self-hating, denying my links. But it felt like a fraud when I used to pretend to pass for black in those days. It wasn't any kind of answer, Xanthe was right, really (Warner, *Indigo* 389).

Awkwardly, they try to communicate, and Shaka explains his own upheavals: a failed marriage, failure to make a living in the theatre, and, presently, the struggle of owning and running a restaurant. His personal myth system has been altered too, for after changing his name in the times when rooting oneself in Africa seemed the answer, "I've ended up with no name. I am the Unnameable, ha, which is why I know how to play Caliban, of course. You can feel you're marooned - have you felt that? We're maroons together now, so many of us . . . " (Warner, *Indigo* 394). Here, he has abandoned his polarising stance, dividing 'whites' and 'blacks', and recognises that in a multicultural society such myths of race offer no solutions. He invites Miranda to visit his restaurant, located in a black neighbourhood, where they serve Creole food, good music, and three hundred and ten varieties of rum. Miranda suddenly imagines herself using some of her inheritance from Xanthe (who left all her money to Miranda) to help with the restaurant project. However, she

is suspicious: "In the lumpy and formless place called this world, people didn't meet before the drop of the curtain and begin a happy ending together. Besides, it was a cowardly old world, the one she beheld, the people in it ungoodly altogether" (Warner, *Indigo* 393). But, this is after all a fairy tale! The answer is not to forget the past, the Middle East, AIDS, famine, war, the ozone layer, torture, death, rape, murder, Save the Children, the disappeared, South Africa, even though Shaka declares himself so tired of "our fucking envy and your fucking guilt" (Warner *Indigo* 394). Instead, they engage with each other "so raptly that for a time they would never even notice anyone else outside looking in on the work they were absorbed in, crossing the lines, crossing the squares, far out on the board in the other's sea" (Warner, *Indigo* 395). Again, Warner returns to her mapping, this time allowing the possibility that through personal relationships the waters previously mapped by and for colonisation and economic profit can be remapped for genuine human progress. As the novel ends, Seraphine has taken over Sycorax's role of hearing the noises of the island, but the whispers of the island bringing news of past and present people tell her that "some have settled, they have ceased wandering, their maroon state is changing sound and shape" (Warner, *Indigo* 402). The island sorceress can rest.

In all of Warner's novels, as in her non-fiction as well, she raises far more questions than she ever answers, but the questions themselves are illuminating. A. S. Byatt claims that some gods, particularly the Greek gods, become more real as one grows older, and she notes that Roberto Calasso considers them to be alive in ways that we can plainly see, in art galleries and in language.[13] Byatt states that a painter (for example Velásquez) "with a fine brush and an exquisite

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[13] A. S. Byatt, "Arachne," *Ovid Metamorphosed* (Philip Terry, ed.., London: Chatto and Windus, 2000).

touch makes maps and delineates the visible and invisible world at the point where they touch (Byatt 146). For her, "[w]hat we can see is a clue only to the force, and the beauty, and the order and the complexity, of what we don't see. Gods, or spider-silk" (Byatt 157). Byatt offers the same clues that painters do with their brushes, but in word pictures. Warner's writings also offer us just such an "exquisite touch" connecting the visible and the invisible, and bringing myth to life in our midst.

Conclusion

> Art, even the art of fullest scope and widest vision, can never really show us the external world. All that it shows us is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance. And the soul itself, the soul of each one of us, is to each one of us a mystery. It hides in the dark and broods, and consciousness cannot tell us of its workings. Consciousness, indeed, is quite inadequate to explain the contents of personality. It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves.
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*

In the fall of 2000, I went to visit Stonehenge, curious to see what draws people in the twenty-first century to visit a prehistoric temple that was constructed and reconstructed from 2800 BC to 1100 BC, when its use was discontinued. It is the ultimate embodiment of myth, for only its physical form remains, and the mythologies that instigated its construction and reconstructions are now irretrievable. However, its physical form expresses the power of myth so eloquently that the British government plans to spend millions of pounds rerouting an adjacent highway into a tunnel and removing other nearby roadways and buildings so that the site becomes again a natural landscape. The original constructions of Stonehenge also speak to that same power. Some of the earliest stones at the site were transported from Wales, two or three hundred kilometers distant. The largest stones, presently visible in the Trilithon Horseshoe and the Sarsen Circle, are spectacular not only for their size, but also for the incredible workmanship that resulted in their present shapes and positions. The geometry of the construction is precise, despite the

slope of the land, with some stones cut in a circular arc, linked to their neighbours by vertical tongue-in-groove joints, and held on their uprights by mortice-and-tenon joints. The size of these stones renders the intricacies of the construction simply incredible. Stonehenge, known world-wide, is only one of many mythological relics from the past that convey meaning in the present, and only one of many such sites preserved through considerable expenditure of money, time, and planning. These efforts all indicate the importance of mythology in our lives, and the considerable need, or can I even say longing, that we have to maintain connections with the mythological world, notwithstanding the overwhelming preoccupation of our current Western culture with capitalist enterprise.

In his novel *Paradise News*, David Lodge offers a way to think about our intrinsic connection to the mythological aspects of life by quoting from Miguel de Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life*. I include the entire quote, because I believe that his words more closely express our desire for a connection to the mythic aspects of life more coherently than any amount of theorising will ever do:

> In the most secret recess of the spirit of the man who believes that death will put an end to his personal consciousness and even to his memory forever, in that inner recess, even without his knowing it perhaps, a shadow hovers, a vague shadow lurks, a shadow of a shadow of uncertainty, and while he tells himself: "there is nothing for it but to live this passing life, for there is no other!" at the same time he hears, in this most secret recess, his own doubt murmur: "Who knows? . . . ." He is not sure he hears aright,

> but he hears. Likewise, in some recess of the soul of the true believer who has faith in the future life, a muffled voice, the voice of uncertainty, murmurs in his spirit's ear: Who knows? . . . ." Perhaps these voices are no louder than the buzzing of mosquitoes when the wind roars through the trees in the woods; we scarcely make out the humming, and yet, mingled with the roar of the storm, it can be heard. How, without this uncertainty, could we ever live? (Lodge 293).

I think that this uncertainty in us, whatever label we put on it, is what Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, calls "our inner dimension."[1] He recognises that many people in the modern world do not practise religion, but firmly believes that although we can do without religion, we cannot do without basic spiritual qualities. To him, religion and spirituality differ. Religion is concerned with faith in claims to salvation and some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality; it is connected with religious teachings, dogma, rituals, and prayer. Spirituality, on the other hand, is concerned with "those qualities of the human spirit - such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony - which bring happiness to both self and others" (Gyatso 23). His Holiness calls for "a radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self . . . toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct which recognizes others' interests besides our own" (Gyatso 25). Attention to our inner dimension (our spirituality), to His Holiness, includes the

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[1] Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for the New Millennium* (London, Abacus, 1999).

necessity to care for others: "we can reject everything else: religion, ideology, all received wisdom. But we cannot escape the necessity of love and compassion" (Gyatso 242). Gyatso thus advocates that acting as if there were an ethical framework to our lives will make us happier beings, even in the face of our doubts and cynicisms.

Coming from a similar desire to promote ethical behaviour and thinking in the face of the post-modern relativism, some artists and writers urge us to consider a link between art and social activism. Wilson Harris makes an argument for cross-culturalism in an essay on what he calls the fabric of the imagination:

> such a notion arguably implies that there has been a genesis of the imagination somewhere within the interstices of unrecorded time, that the unique–indeed inimitable–force of such a genesis imbues the human psyche with flexible and far-flung roots in all creatures, all elements, all worlds and constellations, all sciences, all spaces susceptible to visualisation (Harris 175).[2]

Harris goes on to argue that human beings have been conditioned to try and use these beginnings of consciousness to construct unchanging cultural identities. To keep an identity "pure" there must be fear and scorn for what is mixed or impure, any challenge to the solidity of the identity being promoted. According to Harris, while societies endorse changing technologies, they strongly resist what he calls "revisionary potential in texts of reality," and calls for a faith in this revisionary potential to combat "nihilism and mass

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[2] Harris's essay, "The Fabric of the Imagination" (*Third World Quarterly* 12:1, January 1990), was first presented as a plenary address to the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, August 1989.

escapism in the arts of the world" (Harris 176). He believes that we close our eyes and ears to the addiction and violence occurring around the globe. If we continue to cling to our conviction that all is normal and nothing ever changes, he foresees a post-modernism that has lost an appreciation of the life of the intuitive imagination. In the end, Harris calls for a movement in the imaginative arts toward cross-culturalism: "Cross-culturalism needs to breach nihilism. I repeat CROSS-CULTURALISM NEEDS TO BREACH NIHILISM" (Harris 186).

I believe that Marina Warner has been attempting over time to make the same links between the arts (in her visual arts as well as writing) and social activism: "If I have any role to play it is to bring back some kind of enjoyable presence; a lot of forgotten images and stories which not only produce entertainment and aesthetic delight, a rich cultural patterning, but can actually have some kind of - I don't want to sound too pious - helpful function in social terms" (Williams 266). Over the past few years, Warner has become significantly involved in both the academic and popular culture arenas through a rapidly expanding array of visiting professorships, lectures, art criticism, film and book reviews, and essays on literature and culture. She has lectured and published in the British Isles, North America, and Europe, and received honorary degrees from seven universities to date in England, Scotland, and France. Very self-deprecating, Warner has said of herself, "I lack imagination."[3] She made this comment in regard to the many themes that keep reappearing throughout her work, and the images that resurface in successive novels. I believe the reverse to be true. To me, Warner's gift for seeing the mythical content in

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[3] Interview with author, November 14, 2000.

everyday life events, objects, and conversations illuminates the mythic world in which we all live, no matter how unaware of it we are, and makes us aware of its value in our lives.

In the catalogue of an art exhibition she planned and put together in 1996, Warner's introductory essay, "Making Secret Visions Visible," expresses her thoughts about how visual art illuminates the invisible world of mythology.[4] She begins her essay with an epigraph from Emily Dickinson containing the following lines: "The Outer - from the Inner / Derives its Magnitude . . . / The Inner - paints the Outer - / The Brush without the Hand" (Warner, *Inner Eye* 9). Warner goes on to discuss how new technologies with their optical innovations may have profoundly influenced art and representation. However, the ways that images are structured–their form, colour and composition–and also the ways in which they are experienced by their audience, are inextricably connected to iconologies from eras long before the innovations in question. The language of vision, according to Warner, has properties all its own which have changed over time, but its intelligibility is partially derived from familiar expressions, ways of seeing, known codes. Even its more unintelligible aspects use known characters and figures in order to communicate. Warner further argues that images of the inner world have been visualised and communicated so effectively by artists over time that certain conventions have become invisible, in the sense that no one finds them strange. Here she uses the example that no one is surprised by baroque angels: "that a naked boy could hurl himself *sotto in sù* from heaven's ceiling on swansdown wings" (Warner, *Inner Eye* 10). Although Warner is discussing visual art, her

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[4] *The Inner Eye: Art Beyond the Visible* was one in a series of National Touring Exhibitions created by artists and writers on themes of their choice. Warner's exhibition toured England from September 1996 to June 1997.

comments are equally applicable to literary art. Her purposes in mounting the exhibition also appear grounded in the same political stance that informs her writing:

> I wanted to shift the emphasis from explorations of the visible to the riches of the invisible envisioned, to those unpresentable allusions to the conceivable. I also wanted to refresh interest in artistic acts of the imagination, on creative acts of image-making, . . . and reveal that Romantic and later, modernist struggles to express concealed inwardness and subjectivity necessarily draw on the visual linguistics of earlier mystical imagery. . . . It seems to me vital, too, to own up to irrationality within the Western tradition, and not only pre- or post-Enlightenment, but enmeshed with the very Enlightenment itself (Warner, *Inner Eye* 13).

Warner goes on to note that this irrationality is denied, and uses of magic and fantasy have often been ascribed to various Others, who are then characterised as primitive, barbaric, and even inhuman. Warner cautions against "a continuing, deep and unexamined commitment to an idea of reason as distinct from imagination, which may set up in itself a false opposition between the methods the mind uses to gain and apply knowledge" (Warner, *Inner Eye* 14). Looking back at Warner's texts discussed in this dissertation, I feel that she has found ways in her writing to refresh interest in artistic acts of the imagination and creative acts of image-making. Moreover, she does so in ways that particularly focus on women living in a Western European culture which is male-oriented and for the most part male-directed. I believe that Warner's commitment to women has grown and deepened over the extent of her work, and that her texts offer insights about

the strengths and weaknesses of women's connections to the mythological world of story-telling. Moreover, they offer demonstrations of growth in the inner dimensions, or personal myth systems, of each of her female heroines.

Warner's four non-fiction studies of famous women apply her intellectual training and feminist politics to the project of deconstructing myths around four female paragons. These studies offer women a chance to think about what makes a female heroine mythic and why, and also see the feet of clay beneath the mythic personae. At this time, her approach promotes Chinese philosophy as an alternative to Roman Catholicism, and promotes the feminist views of the time largely focused on women's autonomy. In her first novel *Dark Wood*, Warner again points out the pitfalls of Catholicism and the advantages of Buddhist philosophy, but adds a pungent critique of cynicism and failure of belief. Here she offers us a heroine who adheres to an open-minded approach to belief, refuses the cynicism of her male mentors, and attempts to relate to other people in meaningful ways while refusing to play the female victim. Her strength is contrasted with the weakness of the older men in her life. In *Skating Party*, a similar but older heroine struggles with the boundaries of marriage, motherhood, and professional life, trying to live in all of these capacities simultaneously. Eventually, she will find a way to make sense of her life and allow her son to grow into adulthood, while her husband remains mired in perpetual adolescence. Like all of Warner's heroines, these two initial ones are not superwomen, and they cannot "have it all." Their struggles are realistic and specific, but what makes them special, mythologically speaking, is that they all struggle with questions of faith and belief amid the mundane practices of everyday life. Their beliefs are tried and tested in the

bedroom, the kitchen, discussions with friends, not presented in particular "top-of-the-mountain" experiences or divine revelations. They are every woman–uncertain, brave, foolish, fearful, strong, indecisive–but they are seen to grow and change in very positive directions.

Warner continues in her next two novels to present heroines with many foibles and weaknesses. However, like the first two heroines, they ultimately prevail over their problems to emerge with a better understanding of themselves and the world around them, and a better appreciation of the women in their lives. All of Warner's heroines are committed to their families, no matter how exasperating some of their family members may be. They do not worship their mothers, but argue with them, diverge from their practices, decide they are politically and personally hopeless, but learn from them nevertheless. They remain committed to forging a belief system, no matter how hopeless a task that may appear to be at times, and are shown to prevail in times of trouble when male members of the family do not. The work that these women do to carry on, preserving what is possible for succeeding generations yet adapting to change to construct a positive future, is an increasing theme in Warner's texts. The interfamilial struggles of her first novels involving class and money give way in her later ones to larger social struggles including the fraught complexities of race relations. Here again, epiphanies of belief occur in the everyday locations of household and workplace and the everyday relations human beings all have with each other. All of Warner's fictional heroines are artists, underlining the fact that the common ground of the inner world can be found through the world of art and literature: "This common ground is not sequestered from change; it's sown and grown

from the subjective findings, inventions, choices and discoveries of artists, *flâneurs*, dreamers: all of you looking, passing here" (Warner, *Inner Eye* 23). This last phrase of Warner's strikes me as very important, for it emphasises that we who see and read art can and maybe should be more than just passive observers. All of us who read Warner's novels can imagine social change, and can act on our imaginings. Each succeeding Warner novel foregrounds such change more purposefully and vividly, and I look forward to her next novel, to be published this summer.

The importance of thinking about our own personal myth systems cannot be overemphasised, in my opinion, particularly in this twenty-first century, when people's lives are often amazingly fast-paced, and their contacts with their own immediate family members, let alone extended family and other communities (neighbourhood, church, social groups) are becoming scarcer. Many people now sit in front of their computers communicating with people instead of talking with them face to face. Communal rituals, no matter how mundane and tedious they may seem, are important ways to know ourselves and ground ourselves, and many of these have given way to the lure of consumerism and entertainment that is now easily accessible twenty-four hours a day in our own homes. At the far end of the spectrum, community completely disappears when one sits by the hour alone in front of a machine. Psychologist Bruce Alexander discusses this problem in a paper about addiction, where he focuses on what he calls personal dislocation.[5] Alexander believes that addiction is not just about drug use, but about any

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[5] Bruce Alexander's, "The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society" (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, April 2001) is a recent publication on his addiction research, which he has been conducting for over thirty years.

harmful and compulsive behaviour, including drinking, gambling, overeating, overspending, gang membership, petty crime, habitual violence, and so on ad infinitum. He argues that our free market society promotes personal dislocation: "Free markets require that participants take the role of individual economic actors, unencumbered by family and friendship obligations, clan loyalties, community responsibilities, charitable feelings, the values or their religion, ethnic group, or nation" (Alexander 4). Such dislocation from the intimate ties between people and groups (which range from family to spiritual communities) prevents people from achieving what Alexander calls psychosocial integration, with the result that they adopt substitute lifestyles (which may or may not include drug use) and have social relationships that are not close, stable, or culturally acceptable.

I believe that Alexander's formulation makes great sense of the phenomenon of rising violence among children, young adults and adults alike towards each other and the world at large. Presently, in the wake of school shootings, teenage violence, prevalent road rage, and many other such signs of social disaffection, considerable attention is being paid to positive ways of relating to each other in our Western European society. Clearly, we do not do this well in many areas, and the overall direction at the moment is quite negative in many respects. Following the lead of Wilson Harris and Marina Warner, I would like to argue that anyone in the position of educating others (in the classroom, the home, through writing, and so on) needs to focus attention on the mythological world in the stories we tell to our children, to our students, to our friends, to our colleagues, and the questions we would have them consider and discuss. I believe that we can make

change by talking about the myths that we hold dear (the myths that have formed our cultures, the myths that surround us in society and in our families), and exchanging ideas about them. Many of us have been taught that one does not discuss religion or politics in polite society. But society is not so polite any longer! We should be talking about these ideas as if they mattered and stop hiding our personal myths the way we once hid our feminist politics because we are afraid of criticism and ridicule (and perhaps at times still do). I think that it is the cultural and familial myths we pass on–the old stories–that tell us who we are and where we came from. It is important to elicit these stories from our students, children, friends, family members, and so on, as exchanging these stories brings understanding and nurtures the caring and compassion that Tenzin Gyatso would promote. These stories do change for each of us over time, according to where we find ourselves at different points in our lives, just as the "old stories" took on a life of their own in Warner's family histories.

Warner's comments at the conclusion of her 1994 Reith lectures effectively encapsulate her feelings about the political importance of story-telling and explain more effectively than I can the way that stories affect the inner dimension in each one of us. The images that she uses also display a strong similarity to the theories of rhizomes and mapping advanced by Deleuze and Guattari:

> Roots push down from ideas, from the internal maps held in each individual. Literature, and the relating of history, the development of thought, access to and sharing of knowledge, the arts . . . all nourish this growth. It's vital not to abdicate from the making of this internal dwelling

> place. For stories held in common make and remake the world we inhabit (Warner, *Managing Monsters* 93).

Warner's insistent invitation to cherish the making of an internal dwelling place returns us to the epigraph by Oscar Wilde, for it is in that internal place containing our own personal myth systems that we will find our own souls, whatever that word means to each of us. Thus, Warner's books, filled with connections to the mythological world, afford an extraordinary opportunity for her readers to look at our souls and the mythologies that reside there. Reading her texts, we can follow Warner's advice to use "memory, imagination, language to question, to remember, and to repair, to wish things well without sentimentality, without rancour, always resisting the sweet seduction of despair" (Warner, *Managing Monsters* 94).

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